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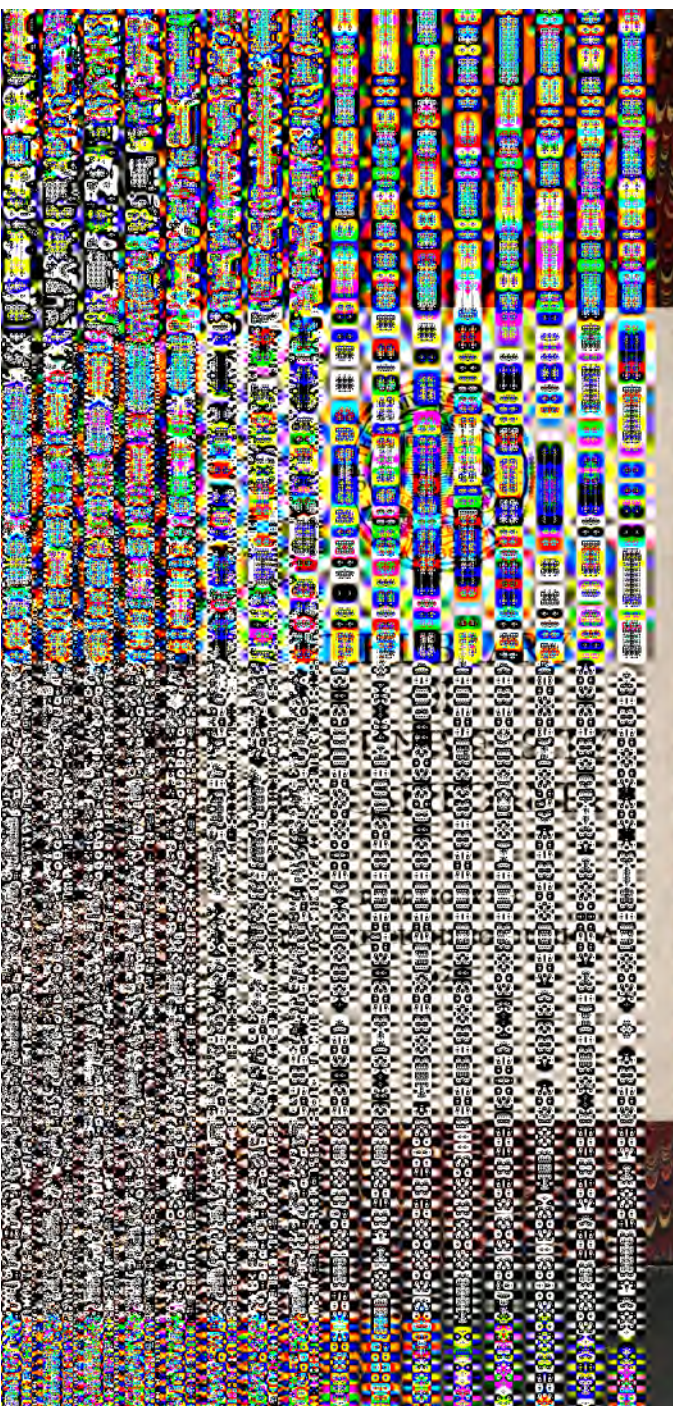
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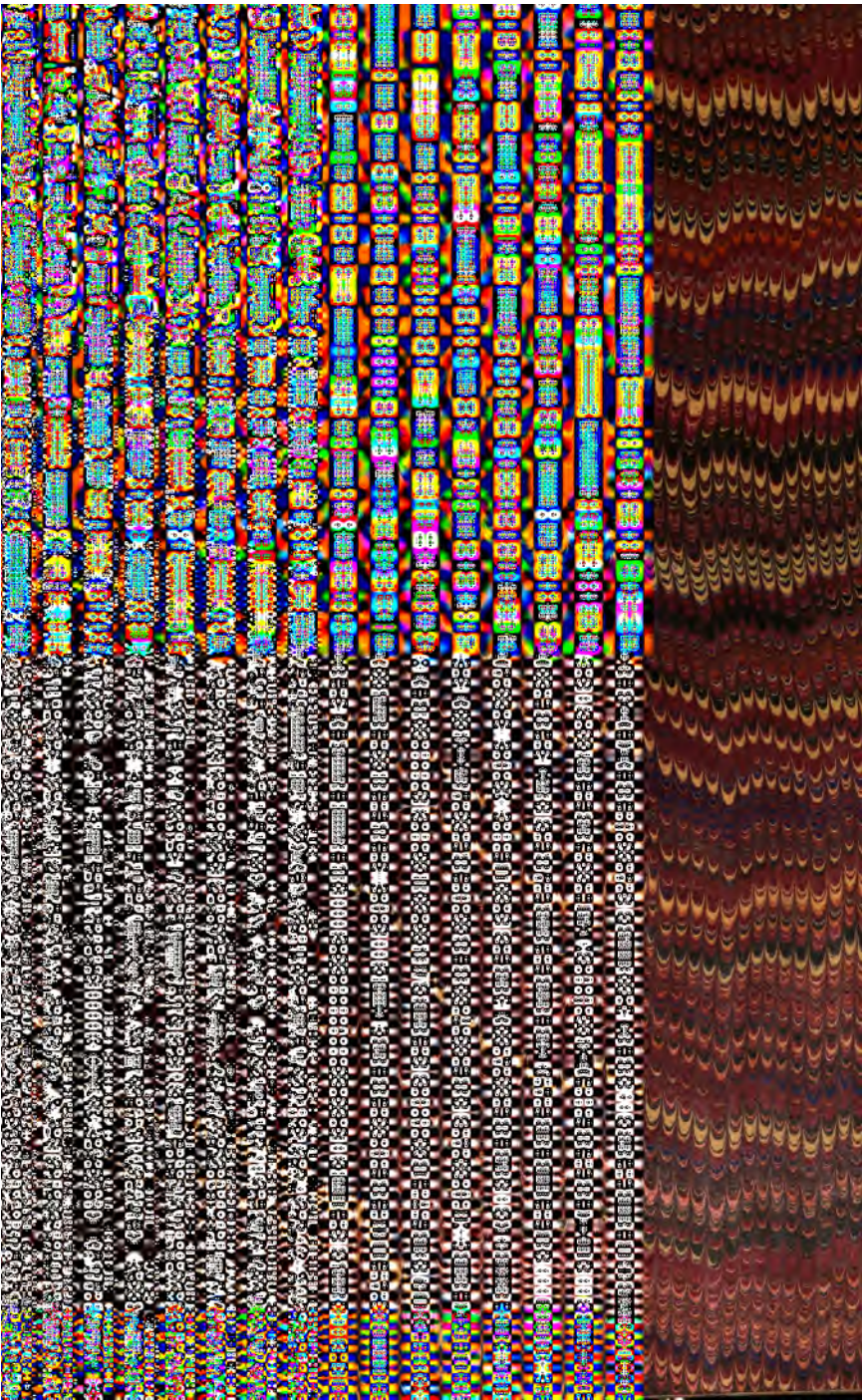
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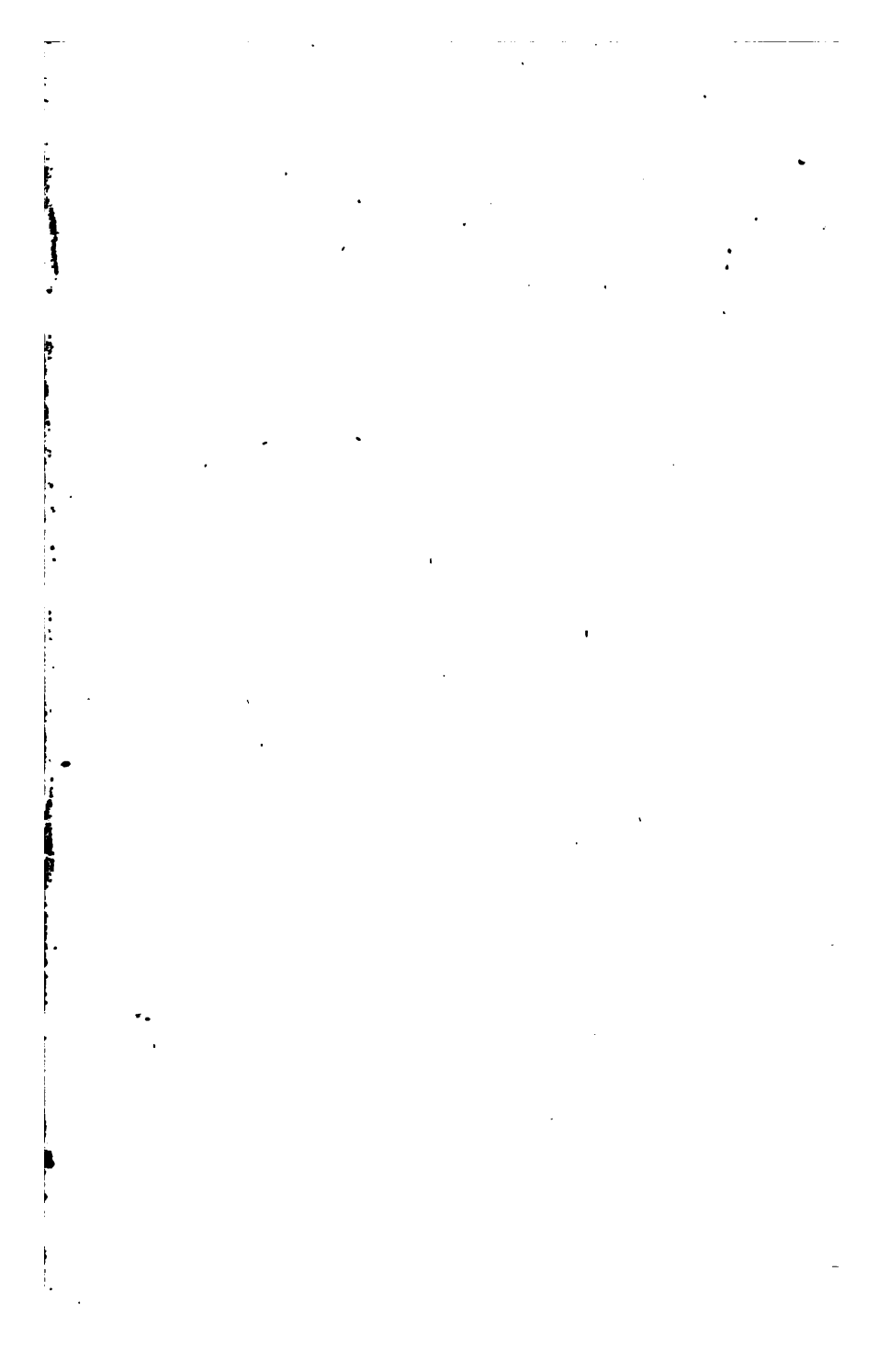


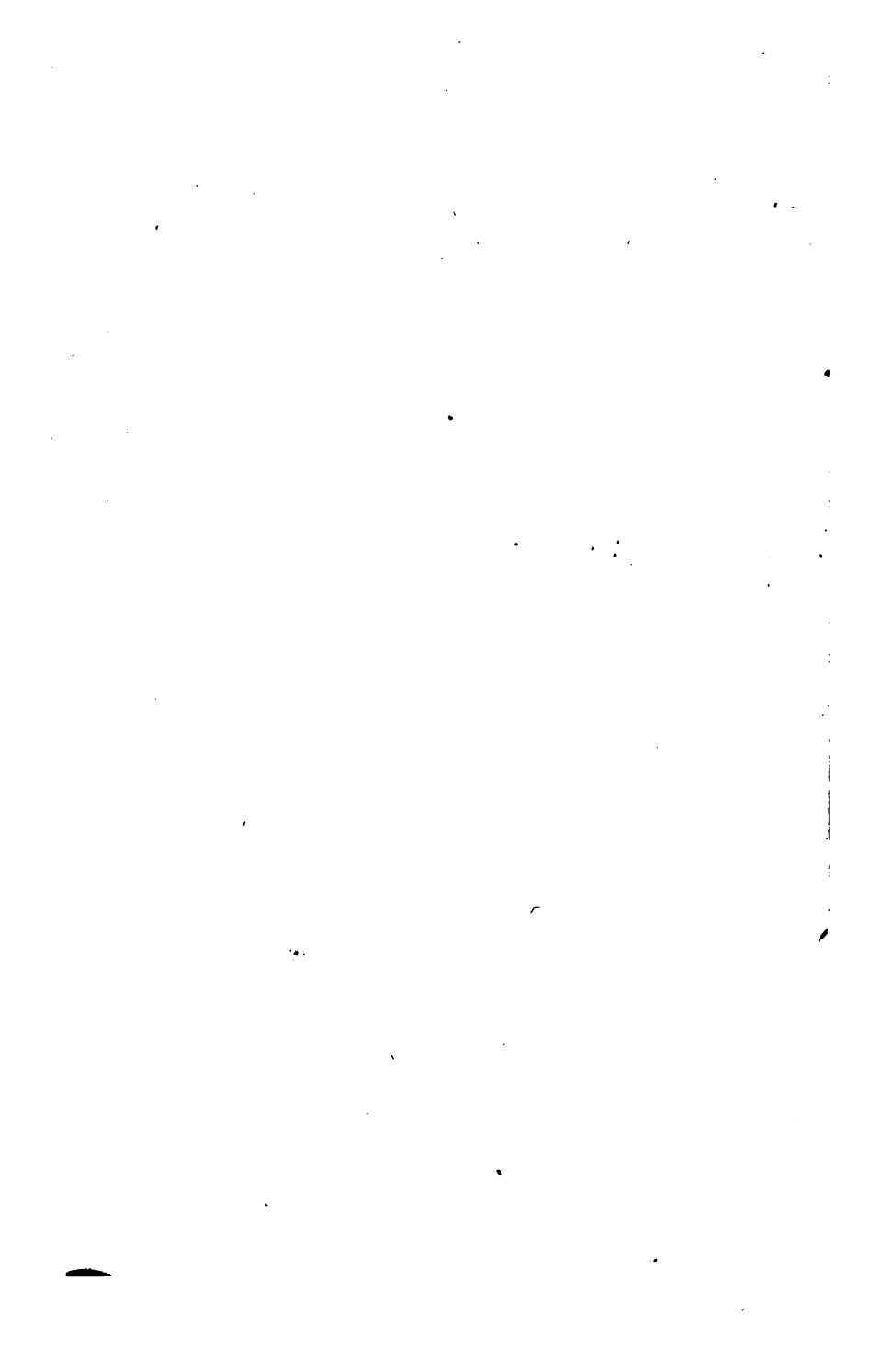


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Sir Arthur Hallam ^LElton

BELOW THE SURFACE.

A Story of English Country Life.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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BELOW THE SURFACE.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE MARRIAGE.

"BUT, Lovell, my good friend, I assure you it is not lawful. You have not the power. You will be pulled up before the bishop!"—exclaimed Nugent, a few days previous to his marriage, whilst walking up and down with Lovell upon the gravel footpath in front of the village church—"You will be put to horrible expense, and finally ejected from your living."

"Well," rejoined Lovell; "all I can say is, that I know no better remedy for the evils prevalent in our rural districts. An interdict would bring people to their senses. Smithers is strongly of that opinion. Only fancy! The church bells mute. The doors of the sacred edifice closed Sunday after Sunday. The dead consigned to their unhallowed graves in solemn silence. The sick man left in loneliness. The priest rarely if ever visible, and then seen passing hurriedly by, with eyes fixed upon the ground, as one who hastens through

some plague-infected district. It would be most impressive, I may say awful."

"But then Mr. Epps, the Independent minister, would have it all his own way——"

"Only for a time. A schismatic is but a quack doctor, after all. His patients would feel it was not the real thing. They would yearn for the church. They would begin to appreciate her value. They would come to the church doors weeping and kneeling and imploring me to receive them, and to withdraw the ban of excommunication from the parish."

"But if they don't value the church now, they never will," said Nugent. "You must teach them to be Churchmen and Christians, before you think to punish them by depriving them of Christian privileges."

"They never will care for the blessings they enjoy till they are stripped of them, and left in heathen destitution."

"I tell you what, Lovell," rejoined Nugent. "Before you act the part of an ecclesiastical Coriolanus, and exclaim to your congregation, 'I banish you'—before you lay us under the ban, I beg you will marry Gertrude and me."

"To be sure I will!" cried Lovell gaily, and suddenly throwing off the monastic gloom which had for the moment darkened his handsome countenance. "To be sure I will! When is it to be?"

"Next Tuesday; and there's to be a grand breakfast

at Beaumont-house. Rather a bore the breakfast, but it can't be helped. Lady Maud likes it. We start then for a tour in Wales. Of course you will come to the breakfast?"

"I think not. It seems mixing up the priest too much with the secular part of the affair."

"Oh! but you know religion ought not to be out of place any where. You must come, just to lend your sanction, your countenance, to the festivity; which, after all, is quite allowable. Indeed, it has scriptural warrant."

"Would it do if I stood a little apart from the guests, looking on with mildness, but with a certain gravity?"

"Forgive me—but you would look so very like a waiter!"

"That is true," admitted Lovell, with a perplexed air. "Well, I will sit down, but abstain from eating and drinking."

"Don't make any resolutions—but come."

Here the church bell suddenly began to toll for evening prayer, which Lovell said daily. The loud but not unmelodious clang awakened the rooks that were clustered in the neighbouring elms, and drove them forth cawing vociferously, as if summoning their brethren to church. Whilst the dusty traveller in the road at the bottom of the hill stopped to listen, resting his pack against a gate, and letting his thoughts run back to his childish days, when he sauntered to church holding his mother's hand some sunny Sabbath after-

noon, with the blue sky overhead, and all the fields quiet and still. The poor sick girl, too, at the white cottage the other side of the valley, heard the sounds come sweetly and faintly in through the open window, cheering her heavy heart, and telling her that prayer—and prayer for her own self too—was going up to heaven from the old church yonder; and she made a sign for her mother to take down the prayer-book, and read and pray with her.

Nugent lingered a moment, then turned to leave the churchyard. "I should like to stay the service," he said; "but I have an appointment with my bailiff, the other side of Copley Hill. Good-day, Lovell; don't forget Tuesday."

"Good-bye, Mr. Nugent. Never fear."

And the two parted. Nugent really wished to remain, but to break an appointment was with him a serious infraction of morality. Yet, certainly, a half hour spent in the sober but earnest devotions of the Church of England, has a calming influence on the mind: takes us out of the thick atmosphere of the world: brings the unseen with a solemn force to bear upon the heart and conscience—especially on the eve of any exciting event, such as a marriage; especially then is it good for us to be for a little while in the House of God. Changes and chances are coming upon us: trials and temptations gathering on the edge of the horizon. The heart needs bracing. The spirit craves to be calmed and strengthened; lighted up, as it were, with a purer lustre.

How many rush into undertakings of great moment, who are yet by no means insensible to religious influences, with minds disordered, thoughts entangled and restless, hearts beating impatiently, their soul's mirror dimmed and overclouded with hopes, fears, and passions thoroughly and exclusively earthly!

We must now, however, take our readers to the Manor-house Farm, and ascertain what preparations Nugent was making for the reception of his young bride.

For five or six weeks subsequent to the events related in the last few chapters, an unusual stir and excitement prevailed within the precincts of that residence. First of all, there was a general dusting and cleansing of the whole house, from top to bottom, under the auspices of Mrs. Finchley. Prostrate charwomen scrubbed the floors. A devoted housemaid, at the peril of her neck, cleaned the outside of the windows twenty feet from the ground. A black object, generally supposed to be the chimney-sweep, emerged from the tops of each chimney in succession, screaming vociferously, to the intense horror and perplexity of the younger children of the village. Then sundry individuals commenced beating carpets on the lawn with frantic enthusiasm. Long-boarded treasures in the upholstery line were dragged forth to be aired and renovated, or perchance ruthlessly discarded for ever. A set of damask bed-curtains, which looked as if they could stand upright of themselves; a piece of ancient tapestry, used for a counterpane, on which

the figure of Blondel the troubadour could be faintly traced, sprawling on his back and embracing a dilapidated guitar, whilst the toe of the lion-hearted king was just perceptible at the corner of the tapestry, the remainder of the design having been either destroyed or cut off. Also a gorgeous dressing-gown, formerly belonging to Nugent's great-grandfather, so redolent of camphor and other preservatives as to set at defiance moths of the hardiest constitution and most adventurous disposition. Then there was a table-cloth on which a scene from scripture was delineated ; but whether the deluge or the passage of the Jordan remained a matter of traditional controversy in the family. There was also a fragment of a black silk cassock, supposed to have belonged to a Puritan divine in Charles the First's reign, which was by no means overlooked by Mrs. Finchley ; but, having been carefully suspended upon a hollyhock to air, fluttered wildly in the wind like an impatient scarecrow.

An old cabinet or two was warming itself in the sun. Five or six quaint-looking chairs had walked out to take the air. An ancient harpsichord with a fractured leg had also apparently insisted on being one of the party. It seemed, however, decidedly an invalid ; and, on its keys being touched, emitted' an incoherent squall like half a dozen canaries suffering from sore throat. Then there was linen and glass in abundance ; and worm-eaten books, and mildewed prints, and pictures half-effaced,

that caused disputes as to which side should be uppermost. Fragments of carved oak and broken furniture—the debris of the old mansion which had been destroyed by fire—lay about in different directions ; whilst Mrs. Finchley herself flitted to and fro, dusting here, scolding there ; now making pencil comments on a faded sheet of paper, containing an inventory of the treasures around her ; now hurrying in search of some forgotten article, and drawing it forth upon the lawn, or into the entrance-hall of the house.

In the mean time, the proprietor of the Manor Farm, and of all these venerable relics of bygone grandeur, was engaged in serious conference with a visitor, shrouded in the peaceful gloom of his library.

That visitor was a thin individual dressed in black, with a limp white handkerchief round his throat. He had short red hair, and eyes of a light blue. His voice was low and soothing ; and, when he addressed you, he almost closed the aforesaid eyes, allowing the eyelids to droop in the most languishing fashion possible. With all that, there was a gentle dogmatism in his way of proceeding—an authoritative though mild obstinacy which it was difficult to resist. Mr. Lamb, for such was his name, was a furnishing upholsterer from ———. He did a little, moreover, in the designing and architectural line, and was much consulted by the neighbouring gentry and clergy when any building, or furnishing, or decoration of churches was going forward. Lovell had

taken Nugent aside, and with some earnestness exhorted him, if he meditated making any improvements at the Manor Farm, to consult Lamb. "Lamb has an eye for the picturesque: Lamb is quite at home in mediæval architecture: Lamb takes a poetic view of things: Lamb has a pure taste. Pugin once looked in at Lamb's shop, and gave him, as a token of his approbation, a design for an early English three-pronged toasting-fork. You *must* consult Lamb!" Accordingly, the first market-day Nugent "looked in at Lamb's shop;" and hence it came about that Mr. Lamb was now standing in a pleasant quaint-looking room, with a mullioned window of pretty good size, looking into a retired part of the lawn. It had been formerly the best bed-room, but was now used as a cheese-room. Nugent respectfully listened to all that he had to say.

"My dear sir," Mr. Lamb was observing—"we can make something of this room. We really can. It's a feature!" And, so saying, Mr. Lamb took a foot-rule from his pocket, and lightly made one or two measurements of the dimensions of the apartment.

"Excuse me, Mr. Nugent, but may I presume to ask—you will excuse the liberty I am sure; may I ask if you celebrate family prayer, domestic liturgy, or any of that kind of thing?"

"Certainly," answered Nugent, rather stiffly.

"Then allow me to suggest that we should convert this apartment into the chapel—the oratory. A few

alterations would suffice. Two or three carved oak benches with floriated poppyheads and patent air-cushions; a lectern of rich decorated style; a fald-stool; the altar of wood or stone—that of course depends on your theological bias; and I *think* there would be room for a piscina and a credence table in that corner of the room—I think so—but I will measure——”

Here, however, Nugent grew impatient, and signified that he was no Catholic. He was a plain Church-of-England man.

“Oh—I see!” rejoined Mr. Lamb. “I beg ten thousand pardons. You’re no Puseyite. Well, they *do* go too far. I tell you what will be the thing, my dear sir. We will run you up a handsome family pew, with a small fireplace in it, and neat maroon curtains fringed; and we will have no open benches, save a light deal form without a back for the servants.” And Mr. Lamb, with his eyes all but closed, looked up gently to Nugent’s face for approbation.

“No!” rejoined that gentleman. “I don’t want a chapel. The parish church is hard by. Our family prayers are simple. I’m a Protestant.”

“Then, my dear sir, we must make it the refectory. You understand me? The refectory, or, in short, the dining-room. I have a sweet sketch of a mediæval sideboard (transition from early English to decorated), quite original I assure you.” Whereupon Mr. Lamb produced a roll of paper from his coat-pocket, on which was

delineated something very like a gothic monument, or the façade of a miniature cathedral. "You observe, my dear sir, the mouldings. They are very characteristic. Here you have again the trefoil ornament just appearing. Observe the foliage round the capital of this column. Oh! a most convenient, useful piece of furniture, I assure you, sir. We put our wine in this department. We call it the aumry. The door of it swings on the column on either side. The key, you observe, is pure gothic. 'Tis a copy of one in the door of the crypt at Wells Cathedral! A choice gem. And, by-the-bye, for a wine-cooler we cannot adopt a better article than a font. Yes, sir, a baptismal font. Of course reduced in size, but exactly the same in other respects. Van Voorst has published a very fair collection of them. You can take your choice."

Nugent here took occasion to interrupt Mr. Lamb, and said he didn't like the idea of a dining-room.

"Then what d'ye say, my dear sir, to making it the entrance-hall. We could throw out a bold porch, with a sham groove, to make believe there was once a port-cullis over the door. Buy some old armour, and some ancestors' portraits, to hang against the wall. Also a stag's antlers. Then, with the help of a mediæval umbrella stand and a few sundries, we should do admirably——"

"No, Mr. Lamb—no! Do you *really* think this the pleasantest room in the house?"

“Why, I don’t say it’s the largest, you know, sir, nor quite the cheerfullest. But then it’s a feature: it’s got a picturesque flavour about it. We look at these matters, you see, with a poet’s eye—as well as a tradesman’s.”

“Do you think it would be a pleasant room for a lady?”

“The very thing! A lady’s boudoir! You’ve hit it, my dear sir—a boudoir!” And Mr. Lamb positively opened his eyes almost entirely for the space of a second.

Mr. Lamb was speedily immersed in a fresh current of ideas and calculations suggested by the proposition made by Nugent. The latter stood placidly by, and did not offer much opposition to the various artistic touches and devices, by means of which his companion proposed to convert the apartment in which they stood into an elegant yet picturesque boudoir. He only made two objections; one was to the proposal of a large marble cross upon the mantelpiece; the other to the introduction of stained glass in the windows. The first savoured of Popery; the latter would make the room too dark. It was in vain Mr. Lamb quoted Milton’s “dim religious light.” Nugent replied with another quotation from the same poet, in which the words, “not light but darkness visible,” occurred, and positively forbade the stained glass. The room was too dark already. After some more conversation, the upholsterer professed himself ready to survey the rest of the mansion, and

accordingly they issued from the future boudoir, and proceeded to visit several other rooms in the house. The drawing-room Mr. Lamb suggested should be furnished in the Louis Quatorze style; and, as Nugent was staggered a little at the cost vaguely intimated by Mr. Lamb, that ingenious tradesman met the difficulty by suggesting that all the furniture-hangings and carpet included should be second-hand.

"You understand me, my dear sir?" explained Mr. Lamb, languidly investigating Nugent's rather dissatisfied countenance from under his drooping eyelids—"you understand me? Not shabby—not worn-out goods. Nothing of the kind. Just the edge taken off, as it were. The glare softened. A gentle haze drawn over the damask, like the bloom—the down—upon a peach. I assure you it looks more genteel. Quite the real thing! *Any one* can buy new furniture. The most upstart gent. can lay out his cash on fresh-made goods. But 'tis the old county families, sir—the regular aristocracy, sir—who can show you their ottomans and their sofas wrapped in a halo of antiquity. What an air a venerable Turkey carpet throws over a room! Why, sir, it comes over me so, that I feel disposed to take off my very shoes as a mark of respect! Then the coziness, sir. You're not afraid to sit boldly down in one of those hospitable broad-bottomed arm-chairs, which has lost a trifle of the gilding, and whose yellow damask doesn't dazzle your eyes."

"Well—well, Mr. Lamb, I'll call at your warehouse and see the furniture you allude to."

"Very well, sir. You understand me? I have not the property at present. But I think I can pick up something that will do."

After a good deal more perambulation and discussion, Mr. Lamb was preparing to take his departure. But, just as he took his hat, he paused, and said—"You will excuse me, my dear sir, but you don't intend doing any thing to the farm-building?"

"Oh no! Not at present, at least."

"Oh, very well, sir! If the idea should occur to you, there is one suggestion I would venture to make——"

"Well—what is that?"

"I just cast my eye at the long stall for feeding cattle as I drove my gig up to the stable-door; and it did strike me, sir—it did strike me, that we might make a beautiful hit there, sir. Knock down the existing range of stalls, and run up a partially ruined cloister of the date of the fifteenth century—it would have a most picturesque effect. Chime in with the archway yonder."

"But what am I to do with my bullocks?"

"Oh, put them in the cloisters! The very thing for them. Visitors would say, 'Why, here's an ancient ruined cloister turned into a stall for cattle! What a shame! How shocking! Quite a sacrilege!'"

"No, Mr. Lamb, you mustn't touch my farm-stead. *Here* you may do what you like. You had best come

with me to the housekeeper, and we will see if dinner or refreshment of any sort can be had amidst this hubbub and confusion."

Mr. Lamb assented, and was handed over to Mrs. Finchley's care; whilst Nugent, mounting his grey galloway, started off along a road now tolerably familiar to him—namely, that which led towards Beaumont-house.

There was not much time available for either Mrs. Finchley's or Mr. Lamb's plans for the improvement and renovation of the Manor-house Farm. The marriage between Oliver Nugent and Gertrude Usherwood was to take place three weeks from the date of the day of Mr. Lamb's visit. Nugent had been in no especial hurry to precipitate the ceremony. He felt so contented with the existing relations between Gertrude and himself—felt so much calm gratification in merely knowing that he was seated by her side, without that prospect of speedy separation which casts such a damp over friendly intercourse—enjoyed so riding with her over the scenes he had hitherto traversed in solitude, or, if in her company, with feelings repressed and reserved—that he did not, as is the wont of most men, perpetually urge her to fix an "early day." Some might have attributed this patient contentment to apathy, or lack of due devotion to his betrothed. But, however that may be, one evening, after a casual conversation with Lady Maud, Nugent felt that, somehow or other, it was ex-

pected that he should request Gertrude to name a day, and not a very distant day, for their union. He did not know why he gathered this impression from the conversation in question. He could not recall any thing in Lady Maud's words bearing very directly upon the matter; and yet he certainly felt a very distinct persuasion that he ought to get an early day fixed. Accordingly he broached the subject to Gertrude, who, to his unfeigned surprise, looked positively angry at the proposition being made, and at first refused. However, on Nugent's pressing her with some eagerness to accede to his request, she seemed to relent, and, after signifying that she did not know he cared in the smallest degree about the matter, she finally was induced to agree to the day Nugent proposed.

Besides the various operations going forward at the Manor Farm with a view to prepare it as far as possible for the reception of his bride, Nugent had other business to attend to. Mr. Usherwood had rallied the day after the dispersion of the rioters, and had steadily progressed towards recovery ever since. Nugent had to assist Lady Maud in examining his affairs, and especially his railway engagements and liabilities. To this work he brought a cool and accurate mind, and a quiet determination, which was especially serviceable. He contrived to diminish Mr. Usherwood's losses to nearly one half. It was found that certain trading directors, of whom Mr. Rubbley was one, had managed to accumulate enormous

profits by means of secret jobbery and trafficking, which bore a strong family resemblance to what is commonly called swindling. These gentlemen, to avoid exposure or a worse calamity, reluctantly disgorged a large portion of their ill-gotten spoils. Moreover, the secretary and other officials were found to have fled rather from headlong panic than from sheer inability to meet the demands made upon them, and began cautiously to allow rumours of their being in existence to circulate through the railway world. Finally, it was found that, by instituting a thorough reform in the whole management of the company, and by observing a strict economy along that portion of the line already finished and open for traffic, not only were there hopes of the Rentworth Grand Junction Railway being rescued from insolvency, but of the proceeds actually furnishing a modest dividend of three per cent. per annum, after the lapse of a period of time ranging from ten to fifteen years. The improvement in Mr. Usherwood's prospects, and, what had still greater influence, the feeling that he now knew the worst, had a beneficial effect, and aided the old gentleman's recovery.

Retrenchment was certainly called for, but not to any severe extent. A recently purchased farm was privately disposed of, a page was engaged to assist the butler instead of the two footmen, who, finding over much leisure was superinducing an ungraceful degree of corpulence, had established a private skittle-ground in

the orchard, for the purpose of keeping themselves slim. There must be fewer dinner parties, and not so many visitors. Two carriage horses would be quite as serviceable as four. The drawing-room carpet would last another year, and the toe broken off the marble statuette of "Venus in the Bath," could be replaced with the aid of patent cement, instead of going to the expense of an entirely new article express from Leghorn. Things, therefore, were not so very bad.

And, with respect to Nugent's own plans, Lady Maud had thrown out significant hints, that it might be as well to abandon his present pursuits, and assume the attitude of a landed proprietor of moderate fortune. But she thought best to draw back, finding him decidedly obstinate, and bearing in mind that he had generously waived all claim to any dowry for Gertrude, and settled his own fortune upon her; only stipulating that she should be remembered in case railway affairs improved. It was therefore understood that—at all events for the present—Nugent would continue to farm. He himself thought it the most agreeable and most prudent course in every point of view. "Gertrude will have her garden, and her books, and a horse to ride. I dare say, too, she will soon take some interest in the farm; possibly even superintend the dairy department. In the mean time, I shall have a fixed object and a daily allotment of work before me; shall not bore her with lounging on the

sofa, not knowing what to do with myself. Then I shall be laying by for the future ; not playing the fine gentleman, and wasting my time and my money."

Gertrude's ideas on the subject were probably but little matured as yet. The prospect of marriage is to a young girl full of vague excitement and pleasure. To be mistress of her own house, of her own time ; to enter into society ; to be released from all restraint save from one whom she believes to be blindly and madly devoted to her—a happy combination of slave and protector—in other words a doting husband. Thoughts like these agreeably agitate her mind. She looks little into the stern and prosaic realities of the matter. Freedom, power, pleasure, seem to be just within her grasp. She muses on sweet abstractions. She puts on one side the ills of life, the vulgar cares and petty mortifications. Poor girl—poor Gertrude ! you have yet to discover that married life, despite its manifold blessings and consolations, has trials, and sorrows, and anxieties peculiar to itself !

The lesson each human soul has to learn is learnt in many ways. The gradual discovery of what this life really is—the dawn as it were of bitterness and pain—this is not, cannot be a soothing process. The riddle to some is torture—to all a heaviness and a grief. But merciful, blessed, are the pangs and dreary humiliations ; the shuddering dismay and blank misery. All tends one way : drives us to and fro in search of some rest for

the sole of our foot: of a home never to change, never to pass away: of a Friend who knows all the sin and all the weakness; all the trial, and all the sorrow; all the fear, and all the shame; knows all, and is able and willing to succour every living soul who puts trust in Him.

The evening before her wedding-day Gertrude sat in her bed-room, gazing out of window at the brown autumnal leaves, whirled here and there over the lawn in eddying circles, a withered multitude without rest or peace. The trees just beyond rose dimly against the evening sky in various forms, huge and gaunt, with leafless branches waving passionately to and fro as the wind swept heavily through them. It was a moist south wind that came across the black moor, bending the poplars and alders before it like reeds or rushes; now roaring down the chimneys of the house; now murmuring hoarsely through the wood; now moaning away over the misty hill. The sky overhead was traversed by flying fragments of broken cloud; but towards the south there was a vast undefined mass of vapour, stooping down apparently to the very hedgerows, gradually expanding and enveloping the wide level plain in a curtain of fast-falling rain.

Gertrude seemed depressed by the scene before her. She looked sadly round upon her room. It was stripped of its books and ornaments. In one corner were trunks and boxes, some corded, some half-packed; in another were spread various articles of dress—portions of her

trousseau, apparently displayed for the gratification of the curious. She seemed to have suddenly arrived at a more clear appreciation of the event which was to take place on the morrow. Like a child about to plunge into a stream, who stands on the brink and loses courage as it gazes on the dark water, Gertrude seemed to feel a shrinking at her heart, now the moment was so near when the irrevocable step must be taken. She leant her head upon her hand. Suddenly she started. She felt a tear drop upon her arm. Did she ask herself the question, whether she really and with all her heart loved Nugent? No; if she had had doubts, she would have, with the mere instinct natural in her situation, suppressed them. But she did love Nugent. Perhaps with the affection a girl would feel for an elder brother, rather than for a lover. But she did love him, or, to speak more accurately, she was attached to him; not romantically, not passionately, but yet sincerely. No one, however, who has pledged himself to some particular course from which retreat is impossible, has not some time or other felt a faint misgiving creep over him, and a twilight doubt darken his mind for a space, as the time approached when he must redeem the inevitable pledge. If you had bound yourself to do the most insignificant thing possible on some particular day, you would very likely feel uncomfortable as that day drew near. Much more is there room for transient infirmity of purpose when you are drawing an unknown

lot ; entering on unexplored paths ; about to open an unread book, each leaf of which contains matter momentous to your peace. This anxiety will be much increased if slight premonitory glimpses and hints have been afforded you of the prospect awaiting you, and those not entirely of an encouraging nature. Gertrude was not permitted, however, to indulge long in this melancholy mood. A slight knock at the door made her start from her chair, and hasten to unfasten the door.

“ My dear,” said Lady Maud, for she it was who had knocked, “ pray, don’t think it necessary to be so miserable. You look a perfect spectre ! We are so dull down-stairs. Your father has waked up from his nap, and is groaning over your absence. Do come down and join us. Tea is just going in.”

Lady Maud kissed her daughter, and looked anxiously into her face. She did not, however, vex her with questions. Gertrude clung to her mother for a moment or two in silence, and then prepared to accompany her.

“ By the bye,” said her mother, “ I want your assistance. Miss Beverley is quite *abimée* ! She left the drawing-room almost in hysterics. You must look in as you go down.”

Gertrude did not feel in first-rate condition for administering consolation, but with an effort she acceded to the request, and felt the better for the distraction. She found her way to her former governess’s room, and, after knocking two or three times, took the liberty of

opening the door. The orm had passed heavily over the house, deluging roofs, gardens, lawns, with oceans of rain, and now the sky had broken to the north-west, and the crescent moon gleamed out, every now and then plunging amidst the rushing clouds. Gertrude looked round the room and beheld Miss Beverley lying upon her bed, her hair let down and hanging in loose dark folds about her shoulders. She was gazing earnestly upon the drifting moon, whose white rays fell upon her face. In short, she seemed to have deliberately made up her mind to be wretched.

"My dear," said Gertrude, "you deserve to be well scolded. What do you mean by gazing at the moon in that wild way?"

Miss Beverley did not at first reply, but at length said she did not know. She was very foolish: it was of course wicked: decidedly unchristian, particularly in a governess—a menial like herself. She ought to rejoice at the sweet vista of domestic happiness opening before her dear Gertrude. Still it was hard to part. The lonely and despised alien, the salaried dependant, might be permitted to utter a groan in secret. She did love Gertrude—very dearly: she supposed she had no business—'twas a liberty, perhaps an insult. She couldn't help it. It would soon be over. Her name, her face, would be wiped out from the tablets of Gertrude's memory, like a sum of arithmetic from a slate.

"My dear friend," remonstrated Gertrude—"this is

really foolish—unkind. Why mistrust my affection for you ?”

“I am unworthy of affection,” murmured the other, resuming her examination of the moon.

“I am the best judge of that,” said Gertrude, kissing her. “I will be always your friend as now.”

“You are very kind. I hope we shall meet again.”

“Why not ? Am I going to Australia ? Am I not going to live at the Manor Farm close by yonder ? Now, do throw off this melancholy fit. You know you will make me melancholy, too. For my sake cheer up—there’s a good creature !”

Gradually Miss Beverley rallied, and at length consented to come down-stairs again. As they left the room she grasped Gertrude’s hand and said—

“Promise me one thing. If you are ever in trouble or need a friend, you will send for me ; will you not ?”

“I will, dear—I will !”

“I am but a governess,” and Miss Beverley’s eye once more glanced at the moon.

“Now, don’t be morbid again. You have studied the moon quite enough. Pray, come along, and don’t be unkind and distrustful.” So saying, she took her arm and hurried her down-stairs.

In the drawing-room were, besides Gertrude’s sisters Jessie and Agatha, a few friends who were staying in the house, invited in honour of the wedding. There was

Colonel Roundelay and his two daughters ; an aunt of Gertrude's, Mrs. Le Clerc ; and the family solicitor, who was a man of comfortable fortune, and better off than most of his clients.

There was a somewhat awkward pause in the conversation as Gertrude and Miss Beverley entered the room. Mr. Usherwood woke up from another nap. Jessie said Gertrude looked as if she had been crying ; on which Agatha gave her a reproving pinch, that evoked a faint scream from the younger sister. The colonel, who piqued himself on being a man of the world, and on possessing ready tact, continued the conversation ; or rather—as the conversation just before Gertrude's appearance had had reference to the misfortunes of Nugent's ancestors—gave it a startlingly abrupt turn, fancying he showed great presence of mind.

“ As I was saying, Mrs. Le Clerc, give me real town or real country—if I reside in a town let it be no sham, little, vulgar town ; let me see real streets—shops blazing with jewellery—a rush of people, horses, carriages—something real and stirring. If I am doomed to the country, let me have fields and hedgerows about me ; not a house visible ; no turnpike-road with an omnibus everlastingly rolling along it, but only a muddy lane, with a stout British farmer tramping along in the distance in greasy leather gaiters ; a real farmer to the backbone—none of your clerical farmers, or your fine gentlemen farmers, smelling of a mixture of bone-

dust and eau-de-Cologne! What say you, Mrs. Le Clerc?"

That good lady—Mr. Usherwood's sister—what with the sudden transition to an unexpected topic, and that topic so painfully infelicitous, and what with weak nerves, and a tendency to tremble all over on the slightest provocation, sat in mute anguish, with her eyes starting out of her head. The Misses Roundelay endeavoured to tread on their father's foot under cover of the table, but only succeeded in kicking Mrs. Le Clerc's lap-dog, who emerged with a howl of injured innocence. The family solicitor took up the matter in a solemn and argumentative way, or rather had given a judicial cough preparatory to so doing, when Lady Maud, who, seated at the tea-table, faintly caught the colonel's observations, interposed promptly—

"Yes, colonel—I am all for reality. Every one wears false colours nowadays. One is obliged to act a part to prevent being misunderstood. If I refrain from shaking Sir Eliot Prichard warmly by the hand, and do not say I am charmed to see him, I should give him just cause of offence. It would mean that I did not simply feel indifferent about him, but that I loathed him, and thought him a bore. Gertrude, dear, don't sit so near the fire; it is too much for you."

"Madam," said the solicitor, who, having executed his customary cough, wished to follow it up with a remark—"Madam, these are patent conventionalities. They

count for what they are worth ; the 'small change' we carry in our waistcoat-pockets." And the fat solicitor patted his stomach indulgently.

"That is what I complain of," resumed Lady Maud. "It is all a transparent mockery—a falsehood without an object, which is an insipid sort of thing. There's no use in it: no point."

"True, my lady," said the colonel, "quite true! 'Tis an age of make-believes: of 'your obedient servants,' and 'your sincere friends.' 'Rogues all!—Rogues all!' as James I. said when the lawyers were arguing a point of law in Westminster Hall."

"Thank you, colonel, for your allusion to my profession," said the solicitor, with dignified pleasantry.

"The worst kind of untruthfulness, *I* think," here observed Mrs. Le Clerc, "is shown in servants' characters. The testimonials my servants have brought with them, oh, you never saw such a thing! Beautiful testimonials! But I have never kept a servant six months. Never!" And the poor lady sank back in her chair, oppressed at the thought.

"Susie!" replied Mr. Usherwood, who was sitting with Gertrude's hand in his, half asleep by the fire; "Susie, you've always had bad luck with servants. You're too sensitive by half. Why, you turned away a nurse for dropping a pillow into the fire-place."

"Brother, the pillow was flung at my head, and *then*

found its way to the fireplace, as you know very well!" exclaimed Mrs. Le Clerc, trembling.

"Ah!" said the colonel, "you should judge by the eye and ear. Servants' characters are as full of lies as monumental epitaphs. Why, now, it is a mighty difficult matter to get a good governess."

The two Misses Roundelay gazed entreatingly at their father, and Miss Beverley nearly upset her teacup.

The colonel felt he was somehow on a wrong tack, and veered abruptly.

"By the bye, Mr. Greaves, addressing the solicitor, "how's the railway market?"

"The less we say about it the better," said Greaves, suddenly looking stupendously serious.

"Ah! it must make sad work with many families. Whole fortunes, I hear, cut up. Jointures, and portions for younger children—every thing, swamped and sacrificed. Truly we're a 'nation of shopkeepers.'"

Miss Roundelay here exclaimed with eagerness, that she thought the country round Beaumont remarkably picturesque.

Her father looked round amazed at the interruption; but a loud ring at the front door bell prevented his starting any fresh subject. Gertrude blushed as soon as she heard the bell. Lady Maud smiled, and observed that that was Mr. Nugent. "He has been busy all day preparing for to-morrow."

In a few minutes Nugent entered the room. There

were divers introductions to be effected, for the Roundelays had only arrived that day. Then Gertrude and Nugent sat down a little apart from the company, whilst the others broke into detached groups, and engaged in conversation and music.

"Gertrude, dearest," said Nugent, after a few words had been exchanged, "I have had no time to speak about something that grieved me yesterday—vexed me very much. I found that the housekeeper and the maids stayed at home from church to make cakes and jellies for to-morrow. Now, I am sorry that the Sabbath should have been spent in this way on our account."

"My dear Oliver, what consequence is it? Once in a way, surely, old Mrs. Millet may be left at home. She does little but snore at church."

"I had rather, my dearest, we had breakfasted off bread and cheese than have had the Sabbath so wantonly broken."

"Oh, how dreadful! Bread and cheese! I could not have stood that, Oliver. I would almost have preferred going into a nunnery!"

Nugent looked annoyed, but continued in a low voice—"I know it seems a trifle; but I assure you, dearest love, I set great store by these things. He that despiseth small things, shall fall by little and little. What consequence is it whether there was a knight made of barley-sugar prancing at the top of the cake? It is really mere buffoonery."

"Oh! I love that knight; he's such a dear! Quite a masterpiece of art! I should so like to carry him off!"

"And the Chinese pagoda of spun white sugar—and the fantastic jellies, and all that trumpery!"

"You must have these little things, Oliver; people expect it."

"But why prepare them on the Sabbath, a day of rest?"

"We must eat, I suppose? and cooks must work some part of Sunday."

"I always have cold meat for dinner, myself, on that day," rejoined Nugent.

"Oh, I am not particular, I can assure you! You need not be uneasy about me," answered Gertrude.

The conversation had been carried on in a low voice; but at this point Mr. Usherwood caught the words "cold meat on Sundays," and not thinking the remark was any thing of a confidential character, burst out with—

"Cold meat on Sundays! A pretty kind of dinner. I'm much obliged to you. And why, pray? Why, my dear Nugent—why so?"

Nugent reddened; he had not meant to deliver a homily to the whole room, and he wished the old gentleman safe in his bed.

"Sunday's a day of rest, sir, professedly amongst Christians: and I, as a Christian, wish to make it so in reality. I don't judge others, but I and my household comply with the injunctions of Holy Writ."

"Pardon me, sir," exclaimed Colonel Roundelay, bending his bald head across the table; "but I hope you will not ask me to dinner on Sunday. Voltaire asked Boswell, when he said Johnson and himself were going a tour to the Hebrides, 'You don't insist upon my accompanying you?'—'By no means,' replied Boswell;—'Then, sir,' rejoined Voltaire 'I have no manner of objection to your expedition.' So say I. By all means have your cold meat dinner, but excuse me from sharing it."

"I don't give dinner parties on that day," answered Nugent drily.

"D'ye mean to tell me, my good Nugent," began Usherwood once more—"D'ye mean to tell me you have cold soup and cold fish and cold melted butter? D'ye have your potatoes cold? Your coffee cold? Why, this is a superstition!"

"My plan is very simple. I have a sirloin of beef cooked Saturday, and we eat it Sunday cold, and enjoy it."

"My dear, respected friend, do you have cold water to shave with on Sundays?"

"My dear," said Lady Maud to her husband, "'tis time for you to go to bed. Mr. Grierson enjoins early hours."

"Why," persisted Mr. Usherwood—"it's quite like an Ebrew Jew!"

"I have heard," here observed the fat solicitor—"I have heard of a party in the north, a dissenter, who

was currently reported to dine off cold victuals on Sunday, but I cannot vouch for the fact myself."

"What's the good of it?" asked the colonel.

"I think 'tis a saving of fuel," suggested Mrs. Le Clerc.

"It appears to me," said Miss Roundelay, "to turn the festival of the Lord's day into a day of mortification and humiliation."

"Every one to his taste," said Lady Maud. "This is a free country. Every one to his taste. Every one to his own private judgment."

Here the butler entered to help Mr. Usherwood to bed, and the conversation, which was particularly disagreeable to more than one person in the room, spread into other channels.

Nugent, he scarce knew why, was vexed with himself. Gertrude looked hot and uncomfortable. However, in a few minutes, they began gradually to talk once more, and, not being again interrupted, were soon immersed in the whispered conversation usual on such occasions.

Gertrude, after the party broke up, and Nugent had mounted his horse and ridden homewards, was stopped as she passed her father's door by Lady Maud, who, embracing her, told her, her father wished to bid her good-night. The old gentleman sat in his dressing-gown by the fireside. For some time he held his favourite daughter to his breast, but said little; then he

blessed her, and she, after kissing his face and his hands, hurried out of the room. In her bedroom she found Lady Maud, who stayed with her till late, and sat by her side after she had retired to rest, holding her hand until she had dropped asleep. Then Lady Maud rose, and leaned over her for some minutes with an anxious expression of countenance. Then, softly kissing her forehead, she glided from the room. Passing her husband's bedroom, which was next to her own, she heard his voice as if reading aloud. She listened. He was praying for their child's welfare. For a moment she hesitated, as if disposed to enter the apartment. Then, murmuring something to herself, she hastily passed on, and retired to rest.

Readers of newspapers might have noticed a few days afterwards in the *Morning Post* an announcement to the following effect:—

“On the 23d instant, at Okenham Parish Church, by the Rev. Walter Lovell, Rector of Okenham, assisted by the Rev. Augustine Smithers, third cousin of the bride, and vicar of Little Sweetborough, Oliver Marmaduke Nugent, Esquire, only son of the late Marmaduke Nugent, Esq., of the Manor-house, Okenham, to Gertrude Cornelia, eldest daughter of Richard Hartshorne Usherwood, Esq., of Beaumont-house, Swampshire, and great-grand-daughter of the Countess of Delafield, of the Beeches, Surrey, and of Grosvenor Square, London.”

On the same day there appeared also the following

less ambitious announcement in the principal county paper, "The Swampshire Independent:—

"On the 23d instant, at Okenham Church, by the Rev. Walter Lovell, Oliver M. Nugent, Esq., of the Manor Farm, Okenham, to Gertrude, daughter of R. H. Usherwood, Esq., of Beaumont-house, in the same parish."

Our readers may decide which was penned by Lady Maud, and which by "Oliver Nugent, Esq., of the Manor-house Farm."

We shall not follow the new-married couple into the heart of North Wales, whither they pursued their way after the twofold ceremony of the wedding at Okenham Church and the breakfast at Beaumont-house, but shall take the liberty of waiting at the Manor-house Farm for their return.

Here Mrs. Finchley was devoting her whole soul to the task of making every thing thoroughly comfortable for her young mistress, not, however, without a certain mis-giving, that, after all the furnishing and furbishing, and dusting and decorating, the new inmate would be a great deal too much of a fine lady to appreciate the sacrifices made on her behalf; and would need much quiet counsel, earnest expostulation, and protracted reading aloud out of Alleyne, Newton, Doddridge, and other divines, before she would be adequately convinced of the advantages of her new position.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLINTWOOD UNION WORKHOUSE.

WE must now follow the fortunes of the small individual who, on the occasion of the Rentworth riot, pointed out to Nugent the direction taken by the mob.

No sooner had the yeomanry forced their way over the bridge, and commenced dispersing and pursuing the rioters, than the trooper on whose saddle Edward Harrill was perched, seemed to consider him a rather disagreeable incumbrance ; and after sundry gruff ejaculations of an uncomplimentary character addressed to nobody in particular, abruptly seized the lad by the collar of his jacket, and, swinging him in mid-air for a few seconds, explaining at the same time that he was looking for a soft place for him, dropped him into a heap of road-dirt by the road-side, and then, clapping spurs to the panting animal he rode, galloped in the direction of Beaumont-house, and joined in the pursuit of the rioters with an hilarious cheer—something between a hunts-

man's halloo and an Indian war-whoop. Edward, in the mean time, having picked himself up and in the twinkling of an eye jumped the ditch, carefully ensconced himself behind the hedge, partly to take breath after his long and involuntary ride, and partly to reflect on the course he ought to pursue. He did not precisely know whether he was a culprit in the eye of the law; but one thing he felt very sure of, that he would with all convenient speed get himself out of the reach of the yeomanry. Yet, on the other hand, he was equally anxious to escape the clutches of Harrill his reputed father, whom he regarded with as much loathing and abhorrence as is possible in a boy of twelve years old. In this difficulty there seemed no alternative for him but to take refuge in a place which, though it held out few temptations, had the advantage of offering the security and subsistence of a jail without the preliminary necessity of committing a crime—we mean the union workhouse. Thither, therefore, Edward dragged his weary limbs; and after a toilsome journey—for journey it was to him, being distant some seven miles across country—over hedge and ditch, through brier and copse, he arrived at the lofty iron gate with spear-headed palisades, which protected the entrance of the Flintwood union workhouse against paupers desirous of

decamping without due notice, or against beggars desirous of shelter without an order of admission.

It was dark and chilly when the boy reached the gate, and as he peered through the bars, the gaunt pile of buildings within looked so uninviting, and the few figures scattered about in the yard looked so shadowy and ghostly, that, hungry as he was, it was some time before he could bring himself to ring the porter's bell, which he did at length so timidly that the functionary whose duty it was to answer it, thinking it was the wind, took no notice of it whatever. Whilst Edward was summoning up courage to ring again, a stout farmer riding by saw his apparent embarrassment, and, catching the bell-handle, gave a peal which awakened all the echoes within a mile of the Flintwood union workhouse. This was meant good-naturedly, but the result was not favourable to Edward; because, as the farmer immediately rode on, the whole credit of the performance was given, not to him, but to the boy. An elderly man, hobbling to the gate as fast as a clump foot would permit, greeted him with a volley of oaths and a threat of a month at the tread-wheel. Edward tried to explain, but the only notice vouchsafed was a second series of oaths, delivered by the porter in a leisurely way over his left shoulder as he retreated according to the fashion of

Parthian warriors, and left Edward once more to himself. These tactics of the porter were not the mere result of sudden anger or impatience, but part of a system which he commonly pursued. It was his method of distinguishing between genuine and sham cases of distress—a rough method certainly; but then, as the Chairman of the Board observed, “a rogue relieved is a ratepayer robbed;” and how can you keep rogues in check without a little sharp practice? The plan was then to leave strangers applying for aid entirely unnoticed for periods varying from half-an-hour to an hour. In most cases, a common tramp or impostor would get impatient, and make off; but in the event of the applicant being in real distress he would probably remain, and then, as the phrase went, “he would walk into his penn’orth of bread with all the better stomach.”

After Edward, therefore, had remained seated on the ground the best part of an hour, the porter returned to the gate with his mouth full of bread and butter, and having carefully reconnoitred him and asked certain questions in a surly tone of voice, again left him, and presently returned with a square-shouldered military-looking man with sandy hair, clad in a rough pea-coat, who made all his remarks in quick, disjointed sentences, like words of command. This gentleman was treated

with a certain degree of deference by the porter, tempered however by that familiarity which arises from common sympathies and common antipathies. Both these gentlemen having stared at him for a few seconds through the iron bars, as if he was some diminutive wild beast of vicious habits, the word of command was given by the superior, who was in fact the master of the workhouse, and the gate being flung open, Edward was instructed to "come along in," and entering the yard was forthwith taken to the porter's lodge. Here by the light of a flaring tallow candle he was subjected to the interrogations of the master, aided by the clump-footed porter. Whilst this process was going on, a tall gaunt man, with a moody expression of countenance, joined the company, and the three stood contemptuously staring at Edward, not believing a word he uttered, as he assured them in broken sentences that his father, John Williams—for by that name Harrill passed at the mines, and enjoined Edward to call him—having got into trouble at the riots, he himself was thrown on the world without a friend.

The tall gaunt man just mentioned was Mr. Cockitt, the schoolmaster of the workhouse. His duties were of a somewhat multifarious description; for, in addition to instructing the boys in school, he was expected to look

after their moral training out of school, and to assist the master in maintaining discipline in the workhouse. Consequently the children never escaped from their schoolmaster's oversight. This arrangement in some mysterious way not only soured and hardened his own heart, but filled the children's breasts with an intense abhorrence of their ubiquitous and ever present tormentor. One chief feature in his general appearance that had induced the guardians to elect him schoolmaster, was the moody expression of countenance we have just glanced at. A dark eye, overhanging brows, large prominent teeth, and a square jaw, made up a *physique* which impressed those gentlemen very favourably. But there was another argument in his behalf. His brother-in-law was one of the guardians; and Cockitt himself, having been originally a cow-doctor, was well known to many of the farmers round. Misfortunes in business had induced him to start a small school in the suburbs of the county-town, and from thence his translation to the workhouse was not difficult. He was almost unanimously supported by the guardians.

On the other hand, the master of the workhouse had reached his present position by a different process. Mr. Matthew Maggs had been a farmer, but his wife had got into trouble through ill-using a female farm-servant.

It was for the most part regarded by the agricultural community as a very trifling matter; but, when the trial came on at the assizes, the judge took a strangely different view, and sentenced the woman to three months' imprisonment in the county jail. Here she fell ill of the prevailing epidemic, cholera, and died. From that moment Mrs. Maggs was spoken of at market and at cattle-shows as an undeniable martyr, and it was deemed only a common Christian duty to elect her husband to be master of the Flintwood union workhouse. It was true he was only a farmer, but before he had been a farmer he had been in the police. Now, where could you get a better nursery for workhouse masters than the police?

Maggs the master, then, and Cockitt the schoolmaster, together with the clump-footed porter, stood staring at Edward, occasionally making free and easy comments on his general appearance as if he were an article of furniture, void of sense and feeling.

"He's a bad 'un, I'll be sworn," said the porter, swallowing the remainder of his bread and butter.

"Thorough young scamp—no mistake!" interposed Mr. Maggs, putting his hands in his pockets.

"My humble opinion is this: he's a limb of Satan—neither better nor worse," wound up the schoolmaster, getting a full view of Edward's face by bending his

long body forwards, and resting his hands on his knees.

Edward was far too much exhausted with his day's fatigue to make any reply to these uncomplimentary reflections, and in fact did not precisely gather the meaning of what was said. The voices round him appeared to sound further and further off, the air seemed obscured by a thick haze, and he heard a noise in his ears as of the rushing of a cataract. In another moment he would have fallen ; but, just as he began to feel his knees giving way, a strong hand seized him by the arm and placed him in a chair, whilst a good-humoured voice exclaimed —“ Why, what be staring at, there ? Why don't you give the boy a drink of hot tea, and send him to bed ? Don't you see he's like to faint ? ” The voice proceeded from a good-humoured bustling little woman, the matron of the establishment, at whose instigation Edward was released from further scrutiny, and in process of time stowed away in a bed in the infirmary, after having been refreshed by a plentiful meal of tea and buttered toast, administered to him by the matron herself.

Edward's first sensations at waking were of a mixed character. He had a painful recollection of having been bullied by certain unpleasant gentlemen the

evening before ; but then the kind voice and looks of the matron, and, above all, her excellent tea and toast, much softened the feelings of discomfort lurking in his mind. If he did not see any more of his three friends, and was placed under the charge of the bustling little woman, he thought he should get on pretty well.

It is a good thing that the future is hid from us, or probably some of us would fall into a state of raving mania or blank imbecility. A few days dispelled the lad's dream of comfort. He was cast into the crowd of work-house boys of all ages, sizes, and characters, over whom the gaunt schoolmaster held almost undisputed sway.

His life was not entirely agreeable—this you may say nobody can expect: but it was something worse. It had no glimpses nor snatches of pleasure, save the occasional relief to the sensation of hunger afforded by a rather better meal than usual, or the comfort of a night undisturbed by the petty cruelties of mischievous companions. At an ordinary school, boys may suffer (at their first entrance) a good deal of discomfort and even wretchedness, but there are, in all cases, periods of ease and respite. The victim of fagging or ill-usage throws himself into the sports of the playground or wanders into the woods and fields, and rejoices for a time in perfect freedom and happiness. But, pent up in

a workhouse, with a paved yard for a playground, with little scope for amusement, and with none for that entire freedom of motion so essential to health of body and mind, especially in the young—there was no relief, no refreshment: the mind was always strained one way: it was a life of premature misery, for the griefs of childhood are mostly transient, whilst these were settled and constant. No nature could stand this ordeal without injury. The boys generally, therefore, were divided into two classes—those who were hardened and brutalized—those who were crushed and enfeebled. Of these classes, we suspect by far the largest came under the latter category. You could not walk into the school-room and examine the countenances of the boys, without being struck by the languor and depression pervading them. Want of adequate exercise—that is, the wild headlong healthy exercise so dear to the schoolboy race—had much to do with these symptoms. But there were other causes in operation. Many were imperfectly fed. Of the three scales of diet recommended by the well-meaning junta at Somerset House, the lowest had been adopted at the Flintwood union workhouse because it was the cheapest. Consequently lads, half ravenous with hunger, on stated days were doomed to dine off thin soup or rice milk, without a

particle of bread or solid food. This injudicious diet stunted their growth, impaired their physical powers, depressed their mental energies. A good "bellyful" of something solid, be it merely dry potatoes, skins and all, is a more satisfying meal than a basin of wash, such as that ladled out to the hungry paupers at many a workhouse in England. Of course, you may say that the hard-working labourer has often not so good a meal as this. Well, then, is this your theory? Not to relieve the suffering poor at all, or otherwise to give them relief subject in all respects to the same drawbacks as those with which independent labourers are too often familiar? Let the workhouse roof have a leak or two to admit the winter's rain; let the ventilation be bad, and the drainage pestiferous and fever-breeding; give the pauper just enough food to keep him alive, and abstract from his bed the blanket which kept him a little warmer than the independent labourer. But we on the other hand maintain—if you relieve the destitute poor at all, do so *effectually*. Give them no luxuries; only such food and shelter as will keep body and mind in a healthy state. Hard work, and the natural horror of confinement, will drive away the idle and profligate. It is those who are simply unfortunate: it is these whom the rigours of the workhouse chiefly harass and afflict.

Again, the sensation of imprisonment, and the knowledge that all they possessed was given to them—that they were, in short, mere paupers—this weighed down the spirits of many of the lads, and unfitted them for manfully grappling with the ordinary difficulties of life awaiting them outside the workhouse.

Mr. Cockitt, however, the schoolmaster of the Flintwood union workhouse, duly imparted religious instruction ; and the reader will perhaps think this ought to have cheered and enlightened the minds of some at least of Edward's companions. But Mr. Cockitt's religious instruction was *rather* too doctrinal in its character. For example, armed with a powerful ashen stick, the gaunt schoolmaster stood at his desk, the boys in a large circle drawn up before him. Then at a given signal he commenced reciting the Nicene Creed in a stentorian voice, whereupon the whole school at the pitch of their voices commenced shouting after him word for word. The uproar was deafening ; for well each of the lads knew, that if any one was detected not reciting and that right lustily, then down upon his bare head the ashen stick would descend with admonitory sharpness, to be followed, if the offence were repeated, by cuts on the hand, each of which left behind it a purple bruise. Often on the Sunday, during service at the workhouse chapel,

suppressed cries and smothered groans issued from the school-children's benches, as the dark-eyed Cockitt, whose vigilance never faltered, pounced upon some boy who had chanced to give way to sleep, and with stony knuckle rapped him on the temple, or adroitly pulled him by the hair. Then the shortsighted chaplain, who mildly read prayers once a week, and whose chief duty was to visit sick paupers "at such periods as the guardians appointed and when applied to by the master and matron," would look up with an air of gentle remonstrance at what he thought was the playfulness of the boys, and after a moment's pause proceed again to read his sermon, in a tone which to listen to without going to sleep, was an act of ascetic self-denial.

On every other day the bigger boys were taught tailoring, cobbling, and knitting. The last accomplishment seemed of vague utility; but as the workshops of the tailor and cobbler were small, and the boys numerous, it was thought a brilliant idea, and was highly applauded by the chaplain's lady, who was in ecstasies at beholding eight sickly-looking boys seated in a row, busied in the invigorating pursuit of knitting babies' socks. The man who imparted the mysteries of this art had lost the use of his legs by rheumatism, and the atmosphere of the workhouse had not tended to

sweeten his temper, or render him resigned to his misfortune. His method of maintaining order amongst the pale, fretful lads, who sat cooped up several hours on two days of the week, fingering worsted and knitting needles, was this:—he could not move from his seat without much difficulty, and his first care was therefore to lock his room-door as soon as the lads were in their places, and then place handy by his side a formidable gutta-percha whip kindly lent him by Mr. Cockitt.

A heavy lash or two with this instrument was generally found sufficient to persuade the pupils, if not to attend to their work, at least to desist from the crime of whispering or talking. This mode of maintaining discipline proved however especially aggravating to the boys, and occasioned from time to time outbreaks of a description—to use the words of Mr. Cockitt—"perfectly owdacious." Edward—who, in the course of a year or so, began rapidly to assume the hard and reckless, in contradistinction to the depressed and feeble type, characteristic of the two classes into which workhouse boys are commonly divided—was at the bottom of most of these rebellious outbreaks. One, which obtained for him considerable notoriety, and a thrashing from the honoured hands of the master of the workhouse himself, consisted in inserting into the handle of the aforesaid gutta percha

whip several of the smallest needles he could procure from the women in the house, at a moment when the rheumatic teacher of knitting chanced to be out of the room. The yell of rage and pain which burst from the latter, when, being purposely provoked by the boys, he clutched hold of his whip in order to lay about him as usual, and pricked his fingers almost to the bone, brought several of the inmates to the rescue, and amongst others the matron, who though she could not save Edward from the master's vengeful grasp nor from his brandished cane, yet by dint of threats and persuasion procured the discontinuance of the instrument which was the original cause of the outbreak.

The sole amusement which fell to Edward's lot, and that only after the lapse of some months of silent suffering and sullen despondency, occurred once a week, when it was his turn to be taught a little shoemaking and cobbling in the cobbler's shop. David Price, the cobbler, was a kind-hearted man, and withal full of odds and ends of information. He had at command an inexhaustible stock of tales, chiefly of the marvellous or terrific character. This man took a pleasure in imparting such information as he thought useful, to the boys under his care, and would reward them for good behaviour by fairy tales, or stirring adventures by sea or land, or ghost stories. It

was found, in consequence, that the lads made more progress in shoemaking than in any other branch of education ; and accordingly the visiting Committee of Guardians suggested to the Board, that the boys should have three afternoons of tailoring and only one of shoemaking. The Board immediately adopted the considerate proposal, and the boys were deprived of half of their only weekly recreation in order to promote their skill in tailoring, which to future ploughmen and reapers was of rather problematical advantage. Nevertheless Edward's once-a-week visit to the good-natured cobbler was the only bright spot in an existence otherwise uniformly dark and dispiriting. The friendly looks and cheerful words of this man Price kept Edward's heart human, preserved him from sinking into a state of stupid despair, and gave him a faint hope of better things to come. One favourite class of tales told by Price was that of biography, and more especially the biography of men who had undergone extraordinary sufferings and privations, and yet had either achieved success in life, or, with the help of God, made their very troubles a source of happiness and peace. These tales gave Edward not merely some notion of the wisdom and power of patient endurance, but penetrated his mind with a faint glimmering of the meaning of religion, a department of his

education in which—notwithstanding the religious exercises of the schoolroom and the placid homilies of the shortsighted chaplain—he had hitherto made very indifferent progress.

It would, however, be fair to mention that once or twice during Edward's incarceration in the workhouse, some interest in the welfare of himself and his companions was exhibited by occasional visitors, either official or ex-official. The school inspector, for instance, made a great stir in the schoolroom, and authoritatively suggested a variety of improvements—a few maps, more lesson-books, more reading-books, a row of parallel desks and benches. These suggestions were duly entered in the minute-book, and submitted to the guardians on board-day when there was rather a full attendance. An *ex-officio* guardian moved that the suggestions of the inspector should be adopted. After a pause another *ex-officio* seconded the resolution. Whereupon one of the elected guardians, a member of the Society of Friends, rose and said, that for his part he considered “the additions to the school furniture just proposed to be altogether uncalled for, and very improper indulgences for pauper children.” This sentiment was greeted by the guardians with immense applause. This was followed up by a roar of laughter,

when one of their number declared that he "shouldn't wonder if the 'school spectre,' or whatever you call him, didn't recommend easy-chairs and soft-bottomed couches for the boys to sit upon. But he, for one, wouldn't stand 'none of that nonsense.' "

The chairman, who professed himself entirely indifferent—for he had an eye to the representation of the county, and did not like to offend the farmers—suggested a middle course; namely, that the matter should be referred to a committee. Accordingly, to a committee it went, and the following was the committee's report:—

"The committee appointed to consider the recommendations of her Majesty's inspector of schools, relative to new maps, books, desks, and benches in the boys' school, after duly inquiring into the present state of the school, have come to the conclusion, that with reference to maps and books there is an ample supply consisting of a map of Palestine, half-a-dozen lesson-books, and several Bibles. In order, however, to evince due respect to her Majesty's inspector of schools, they would suggest that an eight-shilling map of the world be purchased, and divided between the boys' school and the girls' school, one hemisphere to each. This, by occasionally changing one hemisphere for the other, will be as useful to the two schools as if both were in possession of a complete map of

the world. In the same manner, the committee suggest that the boys' school and girls' school interchange lesson-books at stated intervals, confining their attention alternately to geography or arithmetic, according as the books came round. With respect to the inspector's suggestion of books for reading, the committee submit that there is no better book than the Bible, of which there are several copies partially dirtied and defaced by the constant use of the boys. This circumstance speaks well for the attention paid to their religious instruction; and to replace them by new copies would seem to throw discouragement on the labours of a pious and energetic schoolmaster. In conclusion, the committee cannot recommend the Board at present to provide new desks or benches, as the expense would not be compensated by any adequate advantage either to the schoolmaster or the boys. They recommend, however, that the table now in the schoolroom be repaired, inasmuch as one of the legs being imperfectly fixed, it is apt although supported against the wall to give way suddenly, and occasion a little inconvenience to such of the boys as happen to be writing their copies at the time.

(Signed)

HENRY CLAIR,	{	<i>Ex-officio</i>	JOSHUA WRIGGLES,	{
		<i>Guardian.</i>	JOHN STOKES,	
			JOHN MUGGINS,	{ <i>Guar-</i>
				<i>dians."</i>

The above was read at a subsequent board-day, and met with general approbation. It is, however, right to mention, in justice to the Flintwood Board of Guardians, that when some months afterwards the Committee of Council on Education agreed to contribute towards the expenses of workhouse-schools, upon condition that the same should be adequately provided with books, fittings, &c., the guardians became somewhat more amenable to reason, and evinced sufficient liberality to secure a share of the conditional assistance proffered by government.

Now and then, but at long intervals, some gentleman having property near, would pay a visit to the school-room, cast a hasty glance at the assembled boys, smile with approval at two or three of the copy-books always kept ready for exhibition on such occasions, and retire abruptly. For example, Lord Swampshire, who had large estates in the immediate neighbourhood, once looked in and asked a few questions, historical and geographical, of the boys; but as neither they nor he himself could answer them, the examination came precipitately to a close. So chucking the naughtiest boy in the school under the chin, and telling him "he looked a good boy," his lordship gave a sovereign to the master to be divided amongst the school, and rushed

out of the room. Whereon the master gravely pocketed the money, and having inflicted a blow or two on the unfortunate boy who had attracted his lordship's notice, by way of a wholesome set-off to an undeserved compliment, dismissed the school, and presented the boys next day with two shillings' worth of apples as the proceeds of the sovereign left in his charge.

With the exception, however, of these accidental interruptions to the ordinary workhouse routine, Edward's life passed in an artificial state of burdensome restraint, embittered sometimes by unjust and sometimes by unwise severity on the part of those in authority at the Flintwood union workhouse.

It may perhaps excite surprise, that Nugent did not take some notice of the lad during his incarceration in Flintwood workhouse. But it was at first commonly believed that Harrill had carried off Edward into Staffordshire. The yeomanry trooper who dropped the boy in the road in his impatience to join in the pursuit of the rioters, anxiously fomented this rumour, fearing the boy might have come to harm, and that the blame would be laid at his door. Nugent's marriage now intervened, and of course absorbed much time and attention.

At length, however, a letter from George Weston informed him that a lad answering the description of

Edward Harrill was in Flintwood workhouse, under the name of Edward Williams, and Nugent immediately made inquiries of one of the guardians on the subject. The guardian, afraid that the lad, if proved to be Edward Harrill, would become a burden on Okenham parish, did not take up the matter very warmly ; but at last, unable to deny who the boy really was, gave such an account of his desperate character and utterly lawless disposition, that Nugent began to think the lad was pretty well placed where he was. At all events he thought he would postpone inquiring into the accuracy of these allegations until he had become a member of the board by virtue of his office as justice of the peace—an honour which he expected would be conferred upon him before the next quarter-sessions. We shall by-and-bye see what steps Nugent adopted with regard to the lad, but must for the present leave Edward where he is, and pursue the main current of our story.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER MARRIAGE.

THE affection subsisting between husband and wife in this country is not infrequently the consequence rather than the cause of their marriage.

Passion or sentiment melts slowly away, but instead of it springs up a strong and true affection, partly promoted by incessantly sharing the same joys and sorrows, partly by the appreciation of the kindness, patience, and self-sacrifice exhibited on either side, partly by that instinctive yearning most of us possess, to lean on some one human creature for comfort, support, and sympathy. This sort of affection is generally of slow growth; and there is a period in married life when extravagant hopes and fancies have fallen into the past, and this truer and deeper feeling has not yet had time to take root, during which the husband and the wife are often exposed to anxiety and discomfort. Unfavourable circumstances, absence of self-control, impatience and pride, injudicious

friends—all these influences may avail to wreck the happiness of a life, to sow seeds of lasting mistrust and smouldering bitterness of spirit, to tear apart for ever the hearts of those who might have been faithful to each other, and thus render marriage rather a means of slow torture than of sweet and peaceful consolation.

There is a period of married life, then, fraught with future happiness or future misery. Without patience, forbearance, and some few grains of Christian charity on either side, affections may be crushed under foot for ever, feelings wounded to the quick, havoc made in the whole heart, which the devotion of years may not entirely repair. And this in the case of those whom the world believed to be what is called "in love" one with the other, and who perhaps in the common acceptation of the phrase actually were so. How much more ruinous then, when charity fails, and patience gives way, and humility is forgotten, in the case of those who have married with little real knowledge of each other's character or disposition; who have but a faint conception of what is lurking beneath the outside mask of soft glances, tender smiles, and looks of breathless reverence, worn so naturally and becomingly before marriage, by those who are, or wish to be thought, in love! The chivalry of man's devotion, what can replace

it, except earnest good-will, and patient kindliness of heart, and respectful forbearance? The absorbing tenderness of woman's love, what can compensate for its slow decay, save, at least, gentle sympathy, humility of mind, and true fidelity?

The disappointments of marriage may thus in some measure be made good, and errors of judgment, or rash impulses of passion, converted from a curse into an actual blessing. But the time is short, and, ere the lesson be learned, the opportunity often escapes our grasp for ever.

Let us then suppose that Nugent and his wife have passed through a portion of the ordeal we have briefly glanced at. There has been the few weeks of enjoyment by the breezy sea-side, and amidst lovely mountain scenery; there has been a short excursion to the shores of a foreign land, amidst multitudinous sights and sounds pleasing from their novelty, and affording food for conversation and mutual sympathy. Certainly by this time they know each other better than they did. The excitement has subsided, many points of character, many little peculiarities have become distinguishable; now and then, on either side, a word or a look has shot a faint quick thrill of pain through the heart; now and then a thought, a sentiment casually let drop, has thrown

a chill over the spirit. All this is natural enough, but amidst the pleasing distractions of travel and the flow of a common sympathy, these little checks in the roadway of life are nothing. Even when they had at length settled down at the Manor Farm it was some time before what we have called the trial period of married life began. The external world engaged much of Gertrude's attention. There was still the sense of novelty—the pride of independence—the crowd of objects for the first time crossing her path, exciting curiosity and interest, if not gratification.

Gertrude's boudoir, as it was called, was a really pretty room. It was wainscoted with old oak from the floor to the ceiling. You looked through an old mullioned window upon a smooth green lawn, part of which was always dark with the shade of a Scotch fir, whose gnarled branches spreading boldly forth here and there, touched the ground as if to gain support, and from thence bent upwards again, hid in dark spiky foliage. Near to the Scotch fir a fine walnut-tree rose slanting from the prevalent winds, whilst lilacs, laburnums, and broom formed a fragrant hedge beyond. On the right, however, of the fir-tree, the trees and bushes had been carefully thinned, and here a picturesque little parterre of flowers gleamed bright in the summer sunshine. The eye, after

resting on many-coloured verbenas and geraniums till it was almost dazzled, felt relieved to look through the intervals of the trees, and see far off the purple hills rising in long undulations above the thickly wooded plains.

Banksian roses profusely covered the mullions of the window, and, mixed with myrtle, overhung the upper part, forming a natural awning against the sun. This boudoir was pleasantly furnished in the main, though Gertrude, as we shall see, very early took the liberty of altering some of the arrangements.

Nugent's aim had been to place within her reach all the comforts, and even luxuries, to which she had been accustomed at home, and at the same time indirectly draw her mind from the vanities of life towards subjects of a serious character.

He rather prided himself in having shown considerable tact in his arrangements for this purpose. For instance, there was a liberal allowance of light literature in the carved oak book-case which covered one side of the boudoir. Next to Scott's novels, however, you came upon a few works of fiction* of a religious cast, strongly inculcating particular doctrines under the veil of an exciting plot, and graphic descriptions of men and things.

Amongst them were the following :—

"Isabel ; or, the Premature Confirmation."

"The Tainted Heart ; or, the Black Spot has Spread."

"De Gubbins ; or, the Self-Reproaches of a Man about Town."

"My Elopement ; or, Confessions of a Runaway Nun."

"Amelia Manners ; or, Satan as an Angel of Light. A plain tale of Puseyite Corruption."

"M—ry Sm—th ; or, Leaves from the Diary of a Popish Scullery Maid."

"The Pious Eavesdropper," in 8 volumes, &c., &c., &c.

Again, next to Bowdler's Shakspeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, you came suddenly upon Wesley's Hymns and Pollok's Course of Time.

Between Gibbon's History and Hallam's Middle Ages, you found Milner's Church History, and shortly afterwards the eye lighted on D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, and Fox's Martyrs. Amongst popular biographies, such as Madame D'Arblay, Lockhart's Scott, &c., you came unexpectedly upon "Lives of the Puritan Ladies of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries" (1 vol. small octavo) ; "Memoirs of Remarkable Infants," &c., &c.

It was, however, in the department of serious reading, that Nugent thought he had exhibited peculiar adroit-

ness. He had provided a few old-fashioned orthodox divines, but had left them in their original binding of dirty brown leather. On the other hand, a variety of theological works, for the most part of the Low Church school, filled the shelves, clad in gay and elegant binding. This, he thought, would certainly tend to withdraw Gertrude's attention from what he deemed an incomplete system of teaching. *The Whole Duty of Man* was there, in a very rusty suit of brown; but next to it shone Venn's *Complete Duty of Man*, bright with green and gold. Taylor's *Life of Christ* was arrayed in sombre habiliments somewhat the worse for wear. Biddulph on the *Collects* blazed in crimson and yellow morocco. Dr. Going's "*Prophecy Made Easy; or, Hard Texts explained to all but Hard Hearts,*" gleamed with a brassy brightness by the side of a slate-coloured copy of the *Bishop of Oxford's Sermons*.

In this way he was inclined to think he should bias Gertrude's mind in the right direction; "for women," he thought to himself, "are pleased with bright colours"—and yet appear to place confidence in her judgment, by putting within her reach theological works of a contrary tendency to that which he believed to be right.

Thus, too, over the fireplace were some very good engravings on secular subjects, but among them a full-

length portrait of Cranmer burning his hand; together with a tinted lithograph of the well-known pious authoress, Sarah Matilda, in the act of stroking the extreme tip of her nose with the feather of a pen.

A Puritan divine, who appeared to be poorly, hung side by side with a celebrated beauty of the court of Charles II. A very stout, comfortable-looking dissenting minister corrected the vivacious portrait of a large-headed child playing with a diminutive tiger meant for a kitten. There was in a more secluded portion of the room a map of England, with the country seats of the nobility and gentry neatly marked upon it. Next to it hung a map of the world, shaded according to the amount of religious light that characterised different parts of the globe. England being Protestant was of course pure white. Ireland being half-Protestant, half-Papist, was mottled like a piebald horse, some parts white some dark. France was very dark, and so was Russia, to denote the presence of popish error in the one country, and Greek superstition in the other. South America was very shady, but the slave states of the North American continent shone like snow. China and the greater part of Hindostan were black, but Turkey being Mahommedan was only grey; the same shade in short as Roman Catholic and Greek Christendom, the

sole distinction being, that whereas in the districts peopled by the followers of Mahomet the dark lines were drawn from north to south, in the countries inhabited by the adherents of an imperfect Christianity, the dark lines were drawn from east to west; the tint was in other respects precisely the same. It followed that those regions where the pure gospel appeared to have penetrated, comprised a painfully insignificant portion of the habitable globe.

There was a pretty little cottage piano in one corner of the room, with some good music, including a few religious pieces and a collection of popular psalm-tunes.

On their first arrival both Nugent and Gertrude were a good deal occupied. Nugent rode daily over the extensive district he now farmed, inspecting the general state of the crops, the condition of the live-stock in the yards and in the fields, and the progress of ordinary agricultural work, as well as of the different experiments and improvements he had set on foot. Two or three months' absence makes many changes in an extensive farm, and accumulates a large mass of work.

Nugent was out sometimes after a hasty breakfast at half-past five, until three or four in the afternoon, when he would look in to see if Gertrude would like a

ride. These rides were not we are bound to say always satisfactory. Nugent was apt to be *distract*, and would unconsciously take his wife in the direction of some part of his estate, where his men were trying a new kind of plough, or laying down long rows of draining tiles, or grubbing up an old hedge. Here almost irresistibly his attention would become absorbed, and whilst moving from one point to another, the moments slipped away, and it was time to make for home. Now and then Gertrude felt a trifle worn out. She said, "It was rather a bore," and thereupon Nugent felt vexed with himself for his thoughtlessness, and yet secretly hurt at his wife's sensitiveness. So he carefully avoided stopping at these spots of attraction, and Gertrude was thankful and contented. If she had had a little more experience she would, perhaps, have now and then herself led the way to the scene of these operations; but as Nugent being of a reserved temper never expressed the faintest wish on the subject, she thought he had made other arrangements, or perhaps, which is more likely, she did not think of it at all. They took, then, long rides beyond the boundaries of Nugent's estate, sometimes to call on friends—the Clairs, the Roundelays, and even Sir Eliot Prichard—sometimes in company with her sisters Agatha and Jessie, and now and then with

Lovell—making excursions as far as Rentworth Forest where they would tie up their horses and enjoy an *extempore* picnic of sandwiches and sherry. Nugent found himself embarrassed by this interference with his various engagements, and accordingly began now and then to ask leave of absence from Gertrude's afternoon excursions.

Gradually therefore it came to be an understood thing, that Nugent, from breakfast time to dinner at six o'clock, took his own course, and was rarely seen by Gertrude, except sometimes for a few moments, and that accidentally. There is nothing peculiar in this circumstance. Business engagements must separate man and wife in the vast majority of cases, and generally the separation is beneficial. A little absence cherishes rather than impairs affection; and, when the time of meeting arrives, there is on either side a little stock of new ideas and experiences to communicate and to compare. But it is very desirable there should be an evident reason for these daily separations. A merchant or stockbroker, who goes to the city punctually every morning, goes plainly under the pressure of necessity, to maintain or augment his fluctuating fortunes: the clerk, who hastens through rain or sunshine to his dingy office, goes to earn bread for his family. In such cases the reason

of separation is plain, and its result is to keep the heart tender and warm, rather than to harden or estrange it. In the case however of Nugent, his young and light-hearted wife, nurtured in luxury and accustomed to have her own way, with little experience of the world, and no knowledge whatever of the cares and responsibilities involved in an agricultural calling, could not understand why Nugent should be so constantly running after his men. She listened with tolerable patience to his explanations, but, after hearing him out, generally remained pretty much of the same opinion as she was before. He was deserting his wife for the society of ploughmen. He was leaving her to wander about alone, or in the company of any chance friend she might pick up, in order that he might count sheep and stare at turnips. He was sacrificing the enjoyment of her society to the gratification of realizing a few pounds' extra profit from his farming operations. These ideas would cross her mind though she did her best to repress them, and the result was a certain degree of discomfort and uneasiness. Their evenings, however, were often happy. It could scarcely be otherwise with two persons really attached to each other as they were. Certainly there were differences of opinion between them on many subjects, but, except on religion, Nugent talked pleasantly and deferentially. He was firm, and we are

afraid a little bigoted on this one subject, but on others he was rarely so. He did not, like some men, contradict his wife on trifling matters of everyday discussion with the indignant vehemence of an eastern satrap. He did not ferociously contest her judgment on the colour of a flower, or bitterly execrate her favourite poet or favourite painter. He was not sulky for a whole evening because she declined to believe that Perkin Warbeck was an impostor, or because she pleaded guilty to a weakness for Joan of Arc. He did not go to bed an hour earlier than usual, slamming the door violently as he retreated, because she would not agree with him in thinking his friend Thompson five feet eleven inches high instead of five feet ten. We say, then, that he talked pleasantly and deferentially on all subjects unconnected with religion, and their evenings were often agreeable. When over-fatigued with the day's exertions, he would avoid that cheerful resource of fox-hunters, a protracted doze on the sofa, by reading aloud to his wife either a new periodical or book of travels whilst she worked or drew. He would sometimes comment on what he was reading in a grave interesting way, not brilliantly or fancifully, but with acuteness and suggestiveness. At such times Gertrude felt something of the quiet charm of home steal soothingly over her

mind. Still, accustomed as she had been to amusement and excitement, and not finding in her husband's pursuits any thing to attract attention or awaken interest, she sometimes felt languid and depressed, and at such times the little feeling of soreness to which we have alluded would come upon her, and react injuriously upon her spirits.

It chanced on one of these less happy evenings that Nugent, who had been distressed that day by an altercation he had unluckily fallen into with Lovell on some theological question, and who could not keep his mind from dwelling upon the arguments and facts adduced on either side, bethought him of a book in Gertrude's boudoir, which he remembered contained a passage bearing upon the subject under discussion. So rising rather hastily he took a candle and exclaimed—

“Gertrude, dear, there's a book—‘Edwards on Grace’—which I think is in your library. I am just going to fetch it if you will allow me.”

Gertrude's face, for some reason not very apparent, became gradually suffused with a deep blush as she heard these words, and lightly springing from the sofa she hastened to Nugent, and, taking the candle, cried—“Let me go—dearest. I'll find it for you in a minute.”

"Certainly not, thank you. I could not think of giving you that trouble. Why, darling, how can you suppose me capable of such rudeness?"

So saying Nugent, gently retaining his hold of the candle, pushed Gertrude's sofa towards her with grave politeness, and walked once more towards the door.

No sooner was his hand on the lock than Gertrude was again beside him, and this time with some slight perturbation of manner exclaimed—

"Dear Oliver, don't go, please! The room is in a little disorder, and I had rather you did not see it. Please, don't, dearest; please——"

Nugent stood in some amazement, then rejoined a little stiffly—

"Well—dearest—just as you like. But I had thought it had been all arranged to your taste. At least, so you told me."

Gertrude, blushing more and more, and her eyes beginning to brim over with tears, replied—

"Oh, yes—yes! I was so much obliged for all your kindness. I have been only making a few little changes, and they are not quite finished, and you see the room looks very untidy."

"Oh, is that all, dearest, then I won't intrude!" Then, kissing her, he quietly went back to his seat,

whilst she hastened up-stairs in search of the book he had intended to fetch.

Some little time elapsed before Gertrude made her re-appearance, and Nugent began to grow impatient. If there was one thing he was particular about, it was having prayers punctually; and when the hand of the clock pointed to a few minutes past the proper time, he took a few hasty strides up and down the room, and finally made the best of his way up-stairs to Gertrude's boudoir. He knocked at the door, and, as he did so, heard a great deal of noise inside, as if every thing was being turned upside down.

"My dear, my dear!" he exclaimed. "It is past prayer time. Are not you coming? Cannot I help you?"

Gertrude, opening the door only wide enough to allow herself to pass, immediately appeared, looking hotter and more flushed than ever.

"What is all this mystery, Gertrude? I hate mysteries. What *are* you about in your boudoir?"

"Nothing! nothing. Only putting to rights, dear. I could not find your book for such a time!"

And so saying, she tripped down-stairs followed by Nugent, somewhat vexed and impatient at what appeared to him a serious want of confidence on the part of his wife.

After prayers the subject was renewed by Nugent's intimating that he really could not see why she should be so anxious he should not enter her boudoir. Not that he wished to do so. He hoped he should never be wanting in the most scrupulous courtesy towards her. He wished her boudoir to be sacred. But he hated mysteries and fuss.

To this Gertrude rejoined by endeavouring to throw a little vivacity into the subject, and exclaiming—

“Now, you good, dear Oliver, who is it I should like to know who is making a fuss? Who is it now? Tell me honestly.”

So saying she held up her pretty little hand, and shook her head at Nugent with an air of mock displeasure.

Nugent could not be otherwise than pacified, and catching the deprecating little hand pressed it to his lips, when at that moment their conversation was suddenly interrupted by the drawing-room door slowly opening to its widest extent.

“Come in!” exclaimed Nugent.

“Who's there?” inquired Gertrude.

The passage was dark, the lamp having been removed in compliance with an immemorial family custom immediately after prayers, and no one was at first visible.

But after a pause the voice of Mrs. Finchley the house-keeper issued from the gloom in accents of stern solemnity.

"Sir—Mr. Nugent—may I speak a few words to you in private?"

"Yes, by all means. Come in; there's no one here but Mrs. Nugent."

"I desire to speak to you *in private*"—rejoined the voice, laying a thrilling emphasis on the last words.

"What, *more* mysteries?" exclaimed Nugent with a groan. "Well, come to the dining-room."

They adjourned to that apartment, and Mrs. Finchley having insisted on Nugent seating himself, stood bolt upright before him, presenting, in the uncertain light of the bed-candle Nugent took the precaution to bring with him, rather a spectral appearance.

"Go on, Mrs. Finchley. What *is* the matter?"

Mrs. Finchley's cap shook with concentrated emotion as she replied—

"The matter, Mr. Nugent, is this: a month's notice or a month's wages, Mr. Nugent. That is what's the matter."

Nugent, in astonishment, exclaimed—

"My good Mrs. Finchley, you must be out of your mind!"

"Not as how"—continued Mrs. Finchley, passing

over with dignified contempt the reflection upon her sanity—"Not as how the wages are an object. By no manner of means. But I wish to act conformably to law and order, being a member of a Christian church these forty year, and served fifty year, girl and woman, in your honoured father's service, who was as good a Christian not to say gentleman as ever was plucked like a brand from the burning out of a bad world, which is neither here or there, and so I go back to where I begun. A month's notice or a month's wages, if you please, Mr. Nugent! Yes, sir, if you please!"

"My good woman, what do you mean? What has gone amiss? What have you to complain of? Pray, don't let us have any mysteries."

"Mysteries! Ay—mysteries you may well say!" continued the housekeeper with increased solemnity. "Mystery! Babylon the great! Mother of abominations! Mystery you may well say. Oh! if your poor father were alive to see this day!"—here Mrs. Finchley showed as much inclination to hysterics as was consistent with a well-regulated disposition, and gave a groan which irritated the membrane of the larynx, and compelled her to cough violently.

"What am I to do?" exclaimed Nugent, despairingly. "She is certainly beside herself!"

Mrs. Finchley having recovered from her cough, hoarsely reiterated—"A month's notice or a month's wages."

"Well—but why? Tell me why?"

"It's been taught me from my youth up until now, and now I am old I will not depart from it. Popish mummeries I will not abide. Touch not the unclean thing—touch not, taste not, handle not!"

"What Popish mummeries do you mean? Speak out or I shall leave the room, and not hear another word! Popish mummeries, indeed! Nonsense!"

"I say and repeat it. Popish mummeries. There are popish mummeries in your house, Mr. Oliver. Ay, under this roof—Ay,"—continued Mrs. Finchley, approaching-closer to Nugent and lowering her voice—"Ay, in your young bride's boudoir. A crucifix—a crucifix! That I should have lived to see such a thing under Oliver Nugent's roof!" then, with an effort returning to the business part of the matter, Mrs. Finchley again exclaimed—"A month's notice or a month's wages, Mr. Nugent. If you please, sir. Yes, sir."

Nugent's countenance expressed annoyance and perplexity. Without replying to the housekeeper, he went to a door which led from the dining-room to the drawing-room, and entering the latter apartment came up to Gertrude, and in a low voice said—

"Here, Gertrude, darling, Mrs. Finchley's in a dreadful state of mind, and says you're introducing Popish mummeries into the house, and have a crucifix in your boudoir——"

Gertrude's face again flushed, but this time with anger, as she replied in rather a raised voice——

"It's a dreadful story; and if I had, it's no business of hers. She's an impudent old thing!"

The door between the two rooms had been left ajar, and Mrs. Finchley, hearing her veracity impugned, emphatically exclaimed from the dining-room——

"Truth I've spoken, and true it is, Mrs. Nugent, as becomes a member of a Christian church these forty year; and fifty year girl and woman in old Mr. Nugent's service, and never had a harsh word until this hour! Though I say it, as ought not to say it!"

Mrs. Finchley blew her nose. Gertrude looked embarrassed, then said to Nugent——

"The poor woman makes a mistake. There's no crucifix there. She mistakes. Send her to bed, dear."

Something in Nugent's expression of countenance caught Gertrude's eye, which she did not like. It denoted a transient feeling of incredulity. In fact, the idea would start up in his mind though he resisted it——
"Then, why would you not let me into the boudoir

just now? What was there in the room you did not wish me to see?"

"Oliver, what do you mean? Can you mistrust me?" exclaimed Gertrude. "Here, take the candle, and come to the boudoir at once. Judge for yourself."

So saying, she seized his arm, and drew him out of the room.

"My dear," answered Nugent, "I believe you. Can you suppose I would doubt your word? But why did you show so much dislike to my entering your room? Have you any thing there you are doubtful I should like?"

"Come with me!" exclaimed Gertrude. "You will see I have no crucifix. The old woman is ignorant. The room was in a dreadful mess as I was changing the books. That was all."

They went up-stairs, and heard behind them another of Mrs. Finchley's sepulchral groans, followed as before by an explosion of coughing.

Gertrude had a slight misgiving as she threw open her boudoir, but it was too late to draw back. The room was certainly in disorder; of that there was no doubt. All Nugent's little arrangements had been altered. Of course, this was nothing very extraordinary. Ladies have a right to arrange their own sitting-room

as they think best. But he was nevertheless somewhat disturbed at what he saw. The theological works he had ranged so neatly in a convenient part of the bookshelves had been summarily ejected. Some of them high up out of reach, evidently intended for ornament rather than use. Some of them altogether missing. The remainder had been flung into the coal-box with apparent contempt.

"I have been altering the arrangement of the books," Gertrude hastened to say, "but had not time to finish before dinner."

"So I see," said Nugent drily, as his eye wandered towards the coal-box.

"Oh! my maid has been using the coal-box to carry the books in. We placed plenty of old newspaper to keep them clean. It answered very well."

"But pray, *where* are you moving the books to?"

"To the spare bed-room, dear, in the book-case with the glass doors to it. I had not room for all my books here, so I moved some I found here. I hope you don't mind, dear?" asked Gertrude, looking up into Nugent's face with her eyes again brimming over.

"Don't mention it, dear," he answered; "but what has become of the map?"

"What, the Gospel map?" asked Gertrude colouring;

"I thought you would not mind, and I—I—I took it down."

"Where is it, then?" persisted Nugent—"Oh! there it is in the corner!" And so saying he picked it up, unrolled it, and found all the light portions of the globe indicative of the prevalence of Protestant Christianity shaded jet-black by a lead pencil.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Nugent rather shocked.

"Oh, I'm very sorry! It was that tiresome Agatha. She was here with Miss Beverley and Mr. Lovell, and they all abused the map for treating Turks and Roman Catholics alike, and then Agatha scribbled over the white parts to tease me."

It was unfortunate at such a juncture. Nugent however only said quietly.—"Well, now, what about this crucifix?"

"It's only an ebony cross," answered Gertrude; "it's not a crucifix at all. Here it is, over the mantel-piece."

It was certainly only a plain cross, but of unusual size, and doubtless Mrs. Finchley had been profoundly taken aback by it.

"Well, dear," continued Gertrude, as her husband stood gazing at it with a rather sorrowful countenance;

"well—it's only a cross. Are not you satisfied now, dear?"

"Dearest, I know there was no crucifix here. I know it because you said so. But I do not like crosses for ornament, and to use them for a religious purpose seems to savour—mind I only say to savour—of idolatry."

"I thought there was no harm in a cross! Agatha has a crucifix."

"Of the two, a cross is of course preferable," answered Nugent gravely; "but I had rather see neither."

"Then you wish me to destroy it. It seems so odd to object to a simple symbol of our faith."

"My dear, follow your own judgment and inclination in this matter. I have merely expressed my own feelings. If it had been a crucifix, I should have spoken more strongly."

"But what," he suddenly exclaimed, "have we here? An engraving of the 'Ascension of the Virgin!' This is really *wrong*, dearest Gertrude. A representation of a superstitious fiction hanging up in my house I cannot suffer! I cannot, dearest; indeed, I cannot!" He spoke with warmth; and Gertrude, worn out by the fatigue and excitement of the evening, yielded to a sudden impulse, and more we fear in anger than in a spirit of obedience, snatched the print from the wall,

and tore it into a dozen pieces. She then, before Nugent could stop her, seized the cross, and was about to fling it out of the window when he gently detained her with—

“My dear child, I beg your pardon for vexing you so. It is all my fault. Here, I will take the cross and give it to Lovell. Do not fling it away.”

Gertrude said nothing; but, sinking into a chair, burst into tears. Nugent sat down beside her, and after a time she brushed away her tears, and they were once more friends. The next morning Gertrude found that the books she had been employed the day before in shifting, were all carefully removed from the boudoir, and stowed away in the book-case in the spare room. The odious map too had disappeared, and she felt relieved and gratified, but her pleasure was somewhat impaired by a little note placed upon her boudoir table, written by Nugent just before he started on his rounds for the day:—

“DARLING GERTRUDE—You will see that I have anticipated your wishes relative to the books. You shall never see them again unless you wish to do so of your own free-will; for, earnestly as I desire and pray you may appreciate works of this character, and much

as I have laboured to select for you those I thought peculiarly likely to suit you, I would not on any account force them upon you. I hope your eyes may be opened in due time, and that you may learn to put away childish things which I am sure in your heart you despise.

“ Believe me to be, till death, your affectionate husband,

“ OLIVER NUGENT.

“ P. S.—Let me draw your attention, dearest, to Ephesians v. 22, 23.”

“ Oh, this is dreadfully solemn!” exclaimed poor Gertrude as the note dropped from her hand.

Here there came a sharp knock at the door. It was Mrs. Finchley anxious to know about dinner. She looked uncommonly gratified, and complacent. She had seen Nugent wrap up the cross in paper, and afterwards despatch it to the parsonage. She had triumphed, as she supposed, over the young misguided wife, and was highly elated with the victory. She endeavoured to modify her air of triumph by a graciousness of demeanour which rather aggravated than diminished the mischief; and Gertrude could not but feel some natural indignation when the old lady glanced to the mantelpiece where the cross so lately stood, and then, with a distortion of countenance meant for a smile, approached her

mistress, and inquired whether she wouldn't like something dainty and out of the common for dinner to-day, the weather being so uncommon hot? Gertrude's abrupt reply was simply—

"Oh, Mrs. Finchley, is that you? My maid Lucy will order dinner. You may go."

She then sat down to her writing-table, and wrote as follows:—

"MY DEAREST OLIVER,—I am much vexed at having given you annoyance, but I really did not know there was any harm in a *plain cross*. You know I am neither High Church nor Low Church; for, to tell the truth, I have never much thought about the matter, and it never *entered my head* I should be suspected of any leaning to Popery! The only reason why I wished you not to see the boudoir was that all the books you so kindly and thoughtfully gave me were scattered about, and I feared it looked as if I did not value them as I ought. If my arrangements had been completed you would not have thought them amiss. Mama made me promise I would put the 'Waverley Novels,' which she gave me, in my boudoir, and there was not room without removing some of the books I found there. Again I say I am *very* sorry, and hope to please you

better, and not to become an *excruciating torment* to you, as I fear I am beginning to be.—Always yours,

“GERTRUDE.

“Postscript.—I must say that I think Mrs. Finchley's behaviour most presumptuous: not to say *insolent*.”

They met that day at dinner and passed a tolerably pleasant evening, no allusion being made to the boudoir, or the books, or the notes that had passed between them. Nevertheless, next day another little note was placed on Gertrude's table to this effect:—

“MY OWN GERTRUDE,—Do not for a moment imagine that I am displeased with you. But another time be open with me. There is nothing so miserable as only a half confidence between man and wife. You *know* that you are my greatest blessing—a treasure for which I can never be sufficiently thankful. It is my very affection for you which makes me sensitive, perhaps morbidly sensitive, to your minutest deviation from the line of Christian rectitude. That you have any conscious leaning towards the dark impurities of apostate Rome I do not believe. But it is wise, love, to draw the line plainly and firmly. Accustom yourself to regard the doctrines of that Church with detestation, and its be-

nighted dupes with cautious repugnance. I have put a few marks in Dr. Going's last new work, 'The Whispers of the Zodiac,' where you will find some passages bearing on this question. Also in an article of the 'Quarterly Controversial Review,' entitled 'Rome Pagan, and Rome Papal. Which was which?' However, I will not dwell on this matter further. In good time we shall understand each other better. And now believe me to be ever your affectionate friend and husband,

"O. N."

"Remember all that has passed is entirely blotted from my mind. Forgive me what *I* have done amiss, just as I freely forgive *you* for your shortcomings towards me. We will not allude to the subject again, but bury it in oblivion. Yours once more,

"O. N."

There is no greater mistake than "burying disputes in oblivion" before they have been thoroughly fought out and exhausted. We "skin and flim the ulcerous place," but "rank corruption, mining all within, infects unseen." We bury but do not destroy the mischief. Like a seed, it oftentimes germinates, shoots upwards, and at some future day bears bitter and poisonous fruit.

CHAPTER IV.

COPPICE-ON-SHINGLE.

THE casual visitor at the fashionable watering-place of Coppice-on-Shingle, when fatigued with the glare and heat of the esplanade, may turn his steps with advantage towards the suburbs of the town. Here in a street composed of inferior shops and second-rate lodging-houses adjoining some of those squalid lanes and alleys to which, with all our wealth and boasted civilisation, we consign the vast majority of the poorer classes—here he will come suddenly upon a picturesque little chapel built of dusky grey stone, which, with its quaint spire and richly wrought façade harmoniously designed, its deep-set arches and abundance of faithfully-chiselled moulding, appears like some genuine remnant of mediæval architecture lingering amidst the flimsy structures of modern date, springing up on every side. No common mind conceived the design of this beautiful building, that, strange as it may seem, is not

out of place in the dingy locality where it stands, but sheds a tranquil and even solemnizing influence all around. Enter through the unbarred door of this seemingly ancient edifice, and you will see a lofty roof with a clerestory supported on a double row of massive columns, and pointed arches of early English or almost Norman date. The light falls chiefly from the windows in the clerestory high above your head, many of which glow faintly with stained glass of subdued, violet-coloured hue. There is nothing to dazzle or strain the eye ; every thing is enveloped in a kind of soft haze, and beyond the arches dark masses of shadow shroud all objects from view, and soothe the mind with suggestions of the mysterious and indefinite. The only part of the interior that stands forth in somewhat more sharp relief is the altar, that, with its crucifix, its varied ornaments, its silver, gold, and precious stones, and the glistening flags which float high up on either side, at once informs you that the chapel you have entered is a place of worship of the Roman communion.

We shall not moralize here upon the craft and subtlety of papists in thus pandering to the weaknesses of human nature, and endeavouring to decoy into their fold weak men and women, who choose their religion not through the exercise of the reason but through the caprices

of the imagination, &c. We shall not thus moralize, partly because we are not sure but the papists are using in this matter the gifts of God justifiably, though in aid of a faith overlaid with superstition. Partly because these pages are intended to be rather a record of facts and experiences than a repertory of the writer's private sentiments and ideas.

Within, then, this sanctuary of a Church, which we trust and believe still holds, in common with our own, enough of gospel truth to save and to sanctify the human soul, there was, at the moment you are supposed to enter, apparently only one person. He is kneeling on one of the numerous chairs strewed over the tiled pavement of the chapel; a man clad in deep mourning, with his head buried in his hands. He has been in that attitude a considerable time; but his occupation has not been so much that of prayer as of silent meditation. As he now rises, and, crossing himself, turns slowly towards the doorway, the light falls upon the head and face of one who, it would seem, had undergone either a sudden mental shock, or a long pressure of anxiety. The pale delicacy of his complexion, giving almost a statue-like appearance to that classic countenance, might have denoted severe and recent illness; but the wandering eye, the knitted brow, and compressed lips, showed a

heart ill at ease, and a mind harassed and disturbed. Tall and slender in figure, with an ease and grace in his movements which spoke of youth and activity, he hardly looked a man verging upon middle life, although a close examination might lead you to believe him between thirty and forty years of age.

Before passing into the porch, his eye rested for a few minutes on the following inscription, written on a card suspended against the oak wainscot separating the porch from the body of the chapel. There were many other cards with somewhat similar inscriptions, but this one was as follows:—

Of your charity pray for the soul of
Sir Tannetlot Clinton, Bart.,
Who departed this life the 10th day of August, 1848,
In the Seventy-Fifth Year of his Age,
Fortified by all the Rites of Holy Church.

"Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, oh, ye my friends! for the hand of the Lord is upon me."—JOB xix. 21.

He sighed, and was on the point of leaving the chapel, when he was stopped by a party of ladies, who that moment entered the porch from the street and quite blocked up the way. He stepped back for a moment into the twilight gloom under the archways, intending to allow them to pass.

The new-comers were Lady Maud and Agatha ; Mrs. Fazackerley and three daughters. Mr. Usherwood brought up the rear.

Agatha stood still in silent admiration.

"What a dear little chapel!" cried the Misses Fazackerley.

"How deliciously soothing!" murmured Lady Maud.

"Cool as a cucumber!" exclaimed Mr. Usherwood, slowly wiping his forehead, and then tranquilly replacing his hat on his head.

"Papa, dear," remonstrated Agatha ; "you forget. This is a chapel."

"My darling, you're always right ; so it is. I'll place my hat on the point of this good saint's sword, with his permission."

"Here, dear papa, let me carry it for you."

"Well, take it, dear. But tell me what's that water in the niche in the porch, there ? Christenings going on, eh ?"

Agatha's attention was, however, at this moment distracted by the lively conversation of the Misses Fazackerley who were in ecstasies of admiration over the various ornaments and relics behind the altar rails.

"What a love of a flag ! Quite the colour of Bella's new dress !"

"No, dear; her dress is more of a lilac."

"Well, darling, what do you call that? Isn't that lilac?"

"No, dearest, as blue as blue can be!"

"My love, I grieve to perceive you are a victim to colour-blindness. It is a downright violet."

"Nonsense; just ask mamma, or Lady Maud!"

Here a scream from their younger sister attracted their attention.

"My dears! Only look here! What a delicious illuminated missal! Look at that sweet little earwig painted on the ivy leaf."

"My dear," interposed Agatha with some gravity, "it's a lady-bird."

"And there's a death's-head moth peeping out of a withered dandelion! How pretty! I suppose that's some sort of emblem, or what d'ye call it?"

"My dear, it's a marygold. Don't be so absurd."

"Agatha! Agatha!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Fazackerley. "This is real Valenciennes lace. I know the feel of it!" At the same time holding up the fringe of the altar-cloth for inspection.

"Oh, Grace, you must not, indeed! It is really very wrong to go inside the altar rails. It is, indeed!"

“Agatha, you are a wicked little Puseyite—you know you are.”

At this moment a crippled old woman hobbled forth from a small recess where she had been watching unobserved the proceedings of the whole party. The suddenness of the apparition drove all the three Misses Fazackerley trembling with fright out of the chancel. They thought her at the first glance an ancient statue issuing from one of the niches round the church to call them to account for their irreverence. The old lady, however, had no hostile intentions, but merely hoped to earn half-a-crown by exhibiting the priest's vestments. The Misses Fazackerley accepted the invitation with much glee, and rustled away with her, talking gaily as they went. Mrs. Fazackerley sank into a chair, and placing her feet upon another chair near her, fanned herself laboriously. Lady Maud gently investigated her smelling-bottle. Agatha, whose attention was riveted by the carved crucifix over the altar, sat down, and commenced copying it in her sketch-book, but with a deprecating kind of look, as if she rather feared it was not right.

“I must ask Mr. Lovell,” she said, “to get his clever carpenter to carve me one like it.”

At that moment Mr. Usherwood's voice issued in friendly accents from under one of the archways—

"Halloo! Why, whom have we here? Sir Reginald Clinton, I declare! Beg your pardon for shoving up against you, but it is as dark as a coal-hole! And how are you? Better I hope? Ah, it's a trying thing to lose a father, and such a father! I know what it is. But it's the old story—the old story. We're all going the same road. Sooner or later—sooner or later. And really, now, Sir Reginald, I am sorry to see *you* looking so ill. You must have a care, really, you must."

By this time Lady Maud, guided by the sound of her husband's voice, had reached the dark figure under the archway whom Mr. Usherwood was thus accosting, and hastened to throw her husband gently into his proper position, namely, the background, and to weave round Sir Reginald the charms of her soft voice and graceful manners.

The reader may question why Sir Reginald, as soon as the passage out of the chapel was clear, had not quietly retired, seeing he was apparently by no means in a mood for the society of those amongst whom he had now fallen. But the fact is that no sooner had his eye lighted upon Agatha than, for a while, he seemed fixed to the pillar against which he was leaning, and watched all her movements with a dreamy pleasure. It was not the excitement of admiration or of passion, so much as

a vague satisfaction in contemplating a young graceful form, and a countenance the pensive loveliness of which reminded him of one of the Italian Madonnas. He watched then all her gestures, and the quiet play of her features, and the dark fringe of her long eyelashes as she looked downwards, with the sort of enjoyment we experience in beholding a picture; but at length, apparently satisfied, was about to withdraw, when Mr. Usherwood stumbled against him, and broke out into the exclamations just repeated.

"This," now interposed Lady Maud; "this is indeed an agreeable surprise, Sir Reginald! We had feared you had left Coppice-on-Shingle."

"No, Lady Maud," answered the other in a low deep musical voice. "There are consolations here which I cannot bring myself hastily to forego. Your daughter, I believe?"—he added, turning towards Agatha, who at this moment approached them.

"Ah, yes! my second daughter Agatha. My dear, this is Sir Reginald Clinton, of whom you have often heard me speak. I am really afraid to say how long we have known each other."

"It seems to me a long time since we have met," replied Sir Reginald.

"Yes—you were a mere child home for the holidays,

and I a gay thoughtless girl—just about the age of Agatha here, but she is not at all like me.”

“ I think I could judge better,” rejoined Sir Reginald, “ outside the chapel. It is dark here.”

“ As a tomb,” struck in Mr. Usherwood. “ A grim place, very! I confess I shall be glad to see daylight again.”

“ My dear, then just go and find the Fazackerleys, and say we are going. We shall walk slowly, and they can overtake us.”

Sir Reginald lifted the heavy matting which curtained the doorway, and allowed Lady Maud and Agatha to pass out. Then, much to the disappointment of one at least of the two ladies, quietly shook hands with them, and with a few words of ordinary courtesy abruptly took his leave.

“ It's all on account of those tiresome Fazackerleys, I dare say,” remarked Lady Maud. “ He shuns commonplace society. My darling, do put your parasol up. Your face will be nothing but a conglomeration of freckles if you go about in the sun like that. And where are your gauntlet gloves? What will become of your wrists, my dear, if you wear those short gloves? How often have I told you, dear, to be careful about these little things? If only to please me, you ought

to remember them. Why, your complexion will be like a mummy's!"

"Dear mamma, I will remember another time. I will, indeed. But what are the Fazackerleys looking at in that shop window?"

Those ladies answered the question for themselves by exclaiming—

"Lady Maud—Agatha—the bazaar's put off! Isn't it a bore?"

"How tiresome! why, what can they mean? What's the reason?"

"Oh! the band of the 101st Fusiliers is wanted to play alternately with the band of the Guards at the dinner to the Elector of Snuffguzzlecraft!"

"As if one band wasn't enough! How very hard!"

"That may be all very true," said Lady Maud, drawing her daughter's arm in hers, and going in a little in front. "But I am not sorry. I think I shall now be able to get you a place at one of the stalls. Clinton knows the Montmorencis, and will, I have no doubt, get you a ticket from them."

"But I don't like being forced on people."

"My darling, it is the way of the world. Half the people you see, get into society by gracefully elbowing their way, and delicately treading on the heels of

those before them. 'Tis the way of the world. But this is nothing, darling. The Montmorencis are all *plain*, and so don't mind having a little beauty at their stall. If they had had any pretension to good looks the case would have been different. Then it would have been a serious matter."

Thus saying, Lady Maud moved homewards with her party, and shortly afterwards a small page was seen to issue from her domicile, bearing between his finger and thumb a scented note directed to Sir Reginald Clinton, Bart., The Grotto, Coppice-on-Shingle, which we shall take the liberty of transcribing :—

"MY DEAR SIR REGINALD—Our unexpected rencontre this afternoon has awakened in my mind a rush of thoughts and associations belonging to the past, which I would not willingly suffer to fade away like a summer cloud. Will you come to us some evening and pass a quiet hour or two, talking over old times? I don't think it needful to force my sympathies upon you respecting your recent heavy bereavement. You are aware how well I knew *him*, and can easily therefore conceive how I feel for *you*. Sincerely yours,

"MAUD USHERWOOD.

"We shall be quite by ourselves to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, if that would suit you."

To which Clinton replied as follows :—

“THE GROTTO,

“*Feast of St. Fidelis.*

“MY DEAR LADY MAUD,—I am obliged for your note, and will be with you to-morrow evening at the time you name. Sincerely yours,

“R. C.”

The result of this little act of hospitality to Sir Reginald was a polite invitation to Agatha to stand behind Lady Montmorenci's stall at the forthcoming bazaar.

The bazaar was held in the picturesque grounds of Montmorenci Castle, sloping down to the seaside in a succession of smooth soft lawns, shadowed by lofty trees, and here and there broken into parterres of brilliant flower-beds, or crossed by stately terraces with stone balustrades and terra-cotta vases covered with flowering creepers. On one of the open spaces of lawn a long tent was erected, and, adjoining it, stood one or two smaller tents. In the long tent were ranged the stalls on which were piled the multitudinous objects peculiar to bazaars. There were pyramids of pincushions and penwipers; piles of crochet-work and worsted-work; layer upon layer of indifferent lace at fabulous prices; a

forest of penny dolls, each dressed in a halfpenny worth of odds and ends, and offered to a charitable public at sixpence a-piece ; innumerable bundles of book-markers composed of bright-coloured ribbons, with pious sentiments or texts of scripture worked upon them in rather a slovenly fashion. There was an assortment of damaged cutlery sent gratis by a liberal tradesman in the town, and marked at prices double the value. There were hideous curiosities fished out of lumber-rooms by the wives of Indian nabobs or distinguished travellers ; a stuffed pelican with a disagreeable odour ; a model of Tippoo Saib's palace, much mildewed ; a New Zealander's head, which the public were requested "not to touch, as it would fall to pieces if handled ;" a little wooden figure of an Indian faquir, with a hook through his back swinging round a pole ; a tomahawk from North America, with some rust on the edge of the blade, which the young ladies behind the stall declared to be human blood, and charged extra for accordingly. Then there were various efforts in water-colour landscape and coloured chalks, some of which were undeniable rubbish, but could not be rejected for fear of giving offence to the ladies who sent them. The Misses Fazackerley had hit upon a brilliant idea, and sent two dozen small dolls dressed as chimney-sweeps with faces painted

black, only one of which was sold; although in despair they sent them round to the company on a tray carried by Captain Poodle of the "Heavies," who heartily wished them a hundred miles off and the Misses Fazackerley along with them. There was a post-office, too, where, by paying a shilling, you obtained about the most stupid attempt at drollery that ever was enclosed in an envelope. Also a peep-show containing a mirror. Here, on the deposit of half-a-crown, you beheld the most interesting object present at the bazaar. The young ladies and old ladies behind the stall opened the day with much vivacity, and a very good imitation of sharp practice; but, after a few hours, flagged and became slightly cross. Also somewhat red in the face. They revived after luncheon, and evinced for an hour or so a pretty good share of spasmodic liveliness, fading away, in the case of the young ladies, to highly unbusinesslike flirtations of a sentimental character with gentlemen purchasers over the sale of rhubarb-coloured slippers, and packets of court sticking-plaster.

Meantime, the band of the 101st Fusiliers played a succession of tunes at long intervals, retiring, when they found the sun unpleasantly hot, to the recesses of their tent. It was interesting to observe how the gallant

fellows, after performing the Alma waltz, sank down exhausted upon the benches carefully provided for them, and with their feet upon deal boards, for fear the grass should be damp, rested for a good half-hour from the severe fatigue they had undergone, before they ventured upon playing another tune. The company poured in and out incessantly during the day, and a vast deal of elegant lumber and infinitesimal rubbish was somehow or other disposed of. What became of the rest we do not pretend to know. It is one of those mysteries which, like the meaning of XXX affixed to public-houses and ale-stores, we cannot expect to know in this world, but may perchance in another. There may possibly be a species of limbo where the unsold articles of a bazaar are stored away according to some secret arrangement made by the feminine portion of the community, and reappear at the next bazaar wherever it be held, again to be rejected and again to be consigned to temporary seclusion.

Agatha, behind Lady Montmorenci's stall, certainly proved a valuable acquisition. Her brunette complexion, and folds of dark hair, and eyes of subdued lustre that seemed to be looking at something far beyond the gay and gaudy scene around her, gave her almost a foreign aspect. But then there was a sweetness about

the mouth, expressive of simplicity of disposition and purity of heart, which belongs especially to our own countrywomen. She shed a quiet radiance over Lady Montmorenci's stall, and certainly gave a decided impulse to the sale of the fancy articles which crowded the counter. Mustached dragoons came and bought enough book-markers and pincushions to fill a wheelbarrow, and did not know what in the world to do with them afterwards. Elderly gentlemen, presuming on their grey hair, were paternally attentive to her, and found their purses mysteriously emptied they scarce knew how.

In short, as the good-natured but plain Misses Montmorenci observed, after it was all over—"Why, Agatha Usherwood was quite the making of our stall!"

Lady Maud traversed the bazaar with her daughter Jessie, sometimes accompanied by one or two men, sometimes alone. She was always observant, and towards the afternoon her eye fell upon Sir Reginald Clinton leaning in an abstracted sort of way against one of the pillars some little distance from Lady Montmorenci's stall, and gazing, but not so as to be easily observed, upon Agatha as with grave courtesy she handed various articles to the company crowding round her stall.

"He seems to be rather struck," thought Lady Maud, in a musing sort of way. "But his is not a common

character. I must not decide hastily. Strange if, after all, Agatha should obtain that position which I had once designed for her elder sister! Very-strange!"

Light and glancing as Lady Maud's gaze had been, it seemed to have in some way vibrated through Clinton's sensitive frame. The eyes of her adroit ladyship could not wander away with sufficient promptitude: they were met by his own. He looked at her tranquilly and kindly, as if he was perfectly aware of what was passing in her mind, but made every allowance for a mother's feelings.

"Sir Reginald—allow me to introduce my youngest daughter to you—you do not know Jessie," exclaimed Lady Maud, as quietly as if she had been searching for him simply for that purpose.

Jessie, a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, blushed and bowed, whilst Sir Reginald with a look of good-natured interest shook her by the hand.

After a few words of general conversation, Clinton turned to Jessie and said, "I wish you would explain something to me, Miss Jessie, for young ladies are often very clever at explanations—I wish you would tell me what that gentleman at the other end of the tent is laughing at. I have noticed him two or three times go off into a succession of the merriest smiles possible, and I cannot make out why. Look now—look at him!

He is smiling now at a model of a very affecting monument from Bury Cathedral."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Jessie; "it is Mr. Grierson, and there is Mrs. Grierson, too! How delightful!"

Now, as the reader has not yet heard of Mr. Grierson's marriage, it is but right to acquaint him it took place a few weeks subsequently to that of Nugent and Gertrude, and that the lady of Mr. Grierson's choice was no other than Miss Beverley, Gertrude's quondam governess. It was a rather sudden affair; but the fact was they had been for the space of two years very good friends, when an accident evoked or brought to light a still tenderer sentiment than friendship. It happened thus:—the good-humoured surgeon had been sent for to Beaumont-house to see one of the inmates, and on arriving was shown into the school-room through some mistake of the servants. Here he found Miss Beverley reclining upon a sofa with a handkerchief to her eyes, so absorbed in affliction that she did not notice him enter the room. She had just received a severe slight. For the second time in the course of one twelvemonth the footman had omitted to hand her the currant jelly. Now, as before explained, Miss Beverley did not like currant jelly, but then the footman had no business to take this for granted, nor had Lady Maud any right to

take it for granted, and look calmly on whilst her domestic was guilty of so deliberate an act of discourtesy. So, Miss Beverley had hastily risen before dinner was quite finished and vanished from the room. But, to make the matter worse, nobody had taken any notice of her departure, being engaged for the moment in a burst of conversation. This aggravated the evil, and poor Miss Beverley, who had really begun to conquer her sensitiveness, or, what is the first step, had begun to try to do so, had a temporary relapse, and gave herself up to profound wretchedness. Now, the surgeon seeing a lady lying on the sofa with a handkerchief to her eyes, naturally presumed that he beheld before him the patient whom he had been called in to attend. Advancing then with noiseless footsteps to the sofa, he sat down on a chair beside her, and, taking out his watch, gently placed his forefinger upon Miss Beverley's wrist in order to feel her pulse. No sooner, however, did that lady feel herself touched than she started up with a suppressed scream, and a look of amazement mixed with terror, which drove away for the moment every vestige of a smile from Mr. Grierson's physiognomy. When, however, Miss Beverley rightly comprehended the state of the case, and perceived that she was supposed to be exceedingly poorly, and was evidently an object of sincere commiseration and anxiety,

she went off into such a fit of inextinguishable laughter, as to be barely able to explain to Mr. Grierson the mistake under which he laboured. When, however, he found out his mistake, it was quite natural for him to laugh too ; and, consequently, they laughed for a few minutes in a very amicable sort of fashion. Laughter and tears are both favourable to the development of sympathy ; and thus, after laughing together for a reasonable time, Mr. Grierson, presuming on old acquaintanceship, as well as perhaps on his position as the medical attendant of the family, began to ask Miss Beverley a good-humoured question or two about the trouble and affliction from which she appeared to be suffering when he was shown into the room. Whereupon Miss Beverley was fain to confess, there and then, that she was very foolish ; and finally was led on to divulge the whole story of the currant jelly, which occasioned a fresh duet of very hilarious laughter, in which it was difficult to say whether Miss Beverley or Mr. Grierson were the principal performers. They had a good spell of conversation afterwards, and Mr. Grierson repeated his visit two or three days following, until Lady Maud, seeing the doctor so often in the school-room, began to be seriously alarmed about Miss Beverley's health. But a note from Mr. Grierson, and an explanation from Miss Beverley with a burst of tears, put the

matter in a proper light, and it was soon the talk of the village that there was to be another marriage at Beaumont-house. The said marriage was highly approved by the Usherwood family, especially by the young ladies, who were not sorry to be released from the school-room a year sooner than their mamma had intended; whilst Lady Maud and Mr. Usherwood rejoiced that Miss Beverley should be comfortably settled in life, and gave her a variety of presents, all of which Miss Seton recommended her friend to decline "with calm dignity." This advice Miss Beverley took the liberty of ignoring, and bade farewell to the Usherwoods with expressions of most affectionate gratitude.

Mr. Grierson then, and his good-looking bride, were spending their honeymoon in a hasty tour, and had taken Coppice-on-Shingle in their way.

After friendly greetings and congratulations had been exchanged with the newly-married couple, Jessie led them away in search of her father, and Sir Reginald turning to Lady Maud, said—

"That good gentleman's face will haunt me for some time to come."

"He is not so absurdly merry as he looks to be—it is his manner, Sir Reginald."

"I don't mean that," rejoined the other. "It is a

curious sensation which I have never yet found deceive me. I feel confident that that man and myself will meet again ; that he is in some way or other fated to influence my future life ; that there is some, maybe minute, yet very distinct, thread, connecting his existence with mine."

"How very strange !" responded Lady Maud. "I should never have expected any thing romantic or mysterious in connection with poor Mr. Grierson."

"Things are interesting or, as you say, romantic in combination, although alone and by themselves utterly flat and prosaic. You mix, in chemical experiments, two colourless fluids, and the result is the richest crimson or most gorgeous purple. So in music. What thrilling sounds are produced by two or three simple notes struck together, when each note by itself would be stale and unprofitable !"

"Would you like to meet the Griersons at our house?" asked Lady Maud. "We can easily arrange it."

"No, Lady Maud, I am much obliged, but had rather not. I shall meet that man again, whether I wish it or not." Then, to turn the subject, added—"You noticed me just now looking at your eldest daughter?"

Lady Maud felt a little uncomfortable, but acquiesced with a careless smile.

"She is very beautiful! My life has been spent so much abroad—but especially in Italy—that, after residing for some time in my native land, it does me good to see a face which brings other times and other lands before me once more."

They were now pacing up and down arm-in-arm under the shadow of tall elm-trees, a little removed from the bazaar.

"Ah!" replied Lady Maud—"I dare say it affords a soothing consolation, this waking up of old recollections and faded memories."

Clinton's face was suddenly grave.

"I think of the past as a penance, not for my amusement."

Lady Maud's small hand gently pressed his arm, as she answered—

"Reginald, you are too severe on yourself. Brought up by a father, loving indeed but certainly austere; with no mother, no sisters to fling round you their gentle influence as you entered upon the world, is it wonderful that you should have for a while exchanged the grim proprieties of home for the excitement of rash but transient dissipation? Do not blame yourself overmuch. You are in the prime of life; the future is before you to make amends for the past."

There was some sense in this, but it did not seem to penetrate Clinton very deep. He looked at Lady Maud kindly, but as on a person whose nature was entirely discordant from his own.

"Thanks for your goodness to me. I desire to make amends, but it is not always in our power."

"Depend upon it, the will is taken for the deed. Do not brood over bygone days. Enter into society a little. Suppose, now, you pay us a visit this autumn when the shooting begins? I should like you to see Okenham valley. It is lovely! And then there is my daughter Gertrude, married to your cousin Nugent, you know; I should like you to see her very much. They say she resembles what I was at her age."

Clinton at first declined, but at length consented to think the matter over, and write word in a day or two.

"But here," he exclaimed, "is Usherwood, and what can he possibly have in his arms? It looks like a baby!"

Up came Mr. Usherwood, flushed and excited, carrying in his arms a huge wax doll, the size of a full-grown child, clad in long clothes and an elegant little nightcap.

"My dear," cried Lady Maud, "what in the name of fortune are you carrying that doll about for?"

"It is too bad—too bad, upon my honour!" exclaimed that gentleman. "It's a perfect conspiracy. I am quite exhausted. What d'ye think? They coaxed me to put into a raffle for a doll! Never won in a raffle in my life, and thought I should be safe; but, as luck would have it—botheration take it all!—I won; actually won: drew the fatal number, and immediately had this bloated doll thrust into my arms, and have been wandering about ever since, not knowing what in the world to do with it. Feel quite like the gentleman in the omnibus, who was asked by a woman to hold her baby for a second, and when he looked round found the woman was gone! But I can't follow out the story, for nobody will take the doll off my hands. They think I have stolen it, I believe. It's too bad! It's like Sinbad the sailor and the old man of the woods. Oh, dear—it's very hot!"

And poor Mr. Usherwood sat down on the edge of a flower-vase, and wiped his forehead on his handkerchief with one hand, whilst he held the doll with its head downwards in the other. Lady Maud, however, as soon as she had ceased laughing, hastened to relieve him of his burden, and proposed adjourning to the carriage and driving homewards, doll and all.

Clinton parted with the Usherwoods, and walked

back towards the town along the sea-shore. Coming to a spot where, under some stunted oak-trees, there stood a rude bench for the accommodation of the public, he sat down, and for a long time watched the tide come creeping quietly up the beach, until, with a low sullen splash, the advancing waves beat against the foot of the sea-wall protecting the esplanade where he was seated. There was scarcely any wind, and the murmur of the waters softly breaking along the shore, was like the echoes of storms long past by, and of sorrows and anxieties now no more.

“But my grief, my secret anguish, can never pass away,” said Clinton to himself—“can never subside even into dull mechanical anxiety. It must ever be alive in my heart, unless I repair, as far as in me lies, the cruel wrongs inflicted on those whom I ought to have loved, cherished, and protected. But I must *act*, not merely meditate.”

And he rose, as if suddenly reminded of a great duty left undone, and hastened homewards.

“Harvey!” he exclaimed to his confidential servant, as he entered his sitting-room, now growing dim in the failing light of sunset,—“How often must I beg you to light the lamps in good time? Oblige me by remembering it for the future.”

"Sir Reginald, I ask pardon, but the sun has only just set."

"Never mind! Light the lamps the moment my rooms seem gloomy. Never mind the sun! Why, I could not distinguish what was on that chair yonder as I entered the room."

"It is your fur cloak, Sir Reginald."

"So I perceive now. But I could not make it out at first. Light up, Harvey—light up!"

And presently the pretty little suite of rooms which Clinton occupied, were illuminated with lamps on the tables, and wax candles on the mantelpieces, as if for the reception of company.

"Any letters, Harvey?"

"One, Sir Reginald, by afternoon post."

He tore it open, and read as follows:—

"GREAT SCOTLAND YARD, LONDON.

"SIR REGINALD,—I regret that I have not any satisfactory intelligence to communicate to you relative to the parties of whom you are in quest. The only clue we have been able to ascertain is the statement of the old man, now an inmate of one of the almshouses at Ryde, Isle of Wight, and formerly boots at Buckram's Hotel, Below Bar, Southampton. This statement the

old man has, I believe, made to yourself personally; but I transcribe it here, in order that you may compare it with what he communicated to yourself when you last visited him. His statement in substance was to this effect:—

“‘ My name is John Darling: I was boots at Buckram’s Hotel, Below Bar, Southampton, from Lady Day 18—, to Michaelmas 18—. On or about November 18—, I remember a foreign lady and child, with an English name on her boxes which I cannot call to mind, putting up at the hotel. They came in a fly from the pier, where they had landed, as I heard, from France.

“‘ There was a pale young man who joined them afterwards, and seemed a sort of servant. He managed all her affairs, and all bills and letters passed through his hands. They were there for some days, and I remember it got about amongst the servants and stable-people of the inn, that there was a screw loose somewhere, and that the lady was out of her mind, and that this pale young man was her keeper. Once I was up betimes to call a party who was going off by the packet for New York, and heard this foreign lady talking at the pitch of her voice to some one outside of the window. She talked so loud that she waked one of the stable-boys, by name

Thomas, but he's dead and gone now. Now there was nobody in the yard for her to talk to, so we concluded she was either sleepwalking or else crazy. Soon after this the young man packed up her things, and ordered a carriage, which Thomas drove, and off they all went; and after a few days' talk the whole thing died away, as it were, and nobody thought much more about it. The Hotel's been done away with this long while, and the people scattered; but I don't think any of them could tell you more than I have done now, except it might be the name on the lady's boxes, which I think I should know if I heard it named. I should add that the lady wore French boots, with lavender-coloured cloth, and sometimes she wore goloshes. The young man's boots were cleaned by the boy who was put to help me when there was much company in the house, and I do not know any thing about them, more than I rather think they were French boots too. The child had red morocco shoes.'

"This is all we can get out of John Darling, and here we are at a stand-still. There is, as yet, no trace of the party to be found after they left Southampton, though it is probable London was their place of destination. Having now set the inquiry on foot, I think I cannot do better than place the matter in the hands of Samuel

Nutt, one of our most active detective officers, in whom you may place perfect confidence."

The letter concluded with some further remarks of no great consequence, and the signature of the writer, who was a superintendent of the metropolitan police.

Clinton mused over this letter a considerable time.

"To my own mind this is conclusive. Indeed, the old man Darling is pretty positive that the name I gave him was the one upon her boxes and luggage. To my own mind, then, it is plain that Winthrop was at Southampton with the mother and child. The date when the money was drawn out from the bank corresponds pretty accurately with the old man's statement. There is no doubt of it. So far, then, there is *some* progress made. I will see this Mr. Samuel Nutt forthwith."

So saying, he rapidly wrote off some letters, and ringing the bell desired them to be posted.

"And Harvey," he added.

"Sir Reginald."

"I leave the day after to-morrow for town. Collect my bills, and tell the valet to get my things together and pack up. And stop! here is another note, not for the post; it is for Lady Maud Usherwood."

In this note he declined to pledge himself to visit Beaumont-house in the autumn, but, with her permission, would leave the matter open until autumn was actually come.

CHAPTER V.

THE COURT OF SEWERS AT THE "SWAMPSHIRE ARMS."

It chanced, about two years after Nugent's marriage, there was an effort made by a few of the tenant-farmers in the neighbourhood of Okenham, to induce their landlords to improve the drainage of the marshes extending between that place and the Rentworth hills. A couple of wet seasons had in some degree opened the eyes of the agricultural community in this district to the disadvantage attending the cultivation of undrained and swampy land. It began to occur to them that it was inconvenient not to be able to turn out a solitary head of cattle in their pastures from November to March, nor so much as to put foot upon their arable land in the winter time except during a hard frost. It was found, moreover, that the pastures were becoming more coarse and rushy every year; whilst the ploughed ground in a wet summer was apt to produce more weeds than corn, and when it was a dry time baked into a solid cake,

showing symptoms of profound distress by splitting into huge cracks in every direction. To drain the marsh by the new-fashioned pipe-drainage was, however, impossible, without procuring a better outfall to the sea than the little stream which flowed through the level could at present boast of. It was therefore a *sine quâ non* to improve this outfall before any thing else was attempted.

But here there was some difficulty. A certain Court, called the "Court of Sewers," sat with great solemnity at stated intervals at the "Swampshire Arms," Rentworth, for the ostensible purpose of looking after the drainage of the level. This court was composed of commissioners selected from the magistrates, clergymen, attorneys-at-law, &c., residing in the neighbourhood. Now, the law of sewers is, we may confidently affirm, a very complex and intricate subject. The statutes referring to it date back, to speak comprehensively, to the dark ages; and although two acts have been passed in the present century, qualifying and defining much which was obscure and supplying much which was deficient, yet the result is still very unsatisfactory. The commissioners' powers are on some points too limited; on others wrapped in obscurity. Digests of the law have been published, and evince much learning, industry, and acuteness. But when

the enterprising student rises from the perusal of them, he is apt to exclaim with Mr. Dangle in Sheridan's "Critic"—"The interpreter is the most difficult to be understood of the two!" We need scarcely say, then, that, to the great majority of commissioners, the law of sewers under which they act and by which they are supposed to be guided, remains to this day little better than a sealed book. Few unprofessional men would venture to give an authoritative opinion on many of the points embraced by these statutes; and the clerks of Courts of Sewers themselves, whenever any thing unexpected or out of the common takes place, are apt to propose an adjournment in order to consult counsel in town, or to fling themselves headlong into the subject at their own homes, and make themselves in some degree master of it before the adjourned meeting comes off.

The Commissioners of Sewers in the district of Okenham were not superior to the generality of their class. And indeed one or two of them, if asked a question on the law of sewers, would pleasantly poke you in the ribs and ask you—"How in the world should they know any thing about the matter?"

It is now, however, time to inquire what particular business is transacted at the meetings of the Court of Sewers, and what particular benefits are thereby con-

ferred upon the marshes placed under their superintendence. In different parts of the country the practice of Courts of Sewers somewhat varies ; but generally it may be stated that their utility consists in stimulating sluggish landlords and sleepy tenants to consult their own interest, by repairing sea-walls which would destroy their property if allowed to admit the sea ; and by cleaning ditches and rivers which if allowed to be choked up would drown their land and depreciate their crops. This process of "stimulating" is effected by means of fines inflicted by the chairman very much at his own discretion ; and certainly the process has a wholesome effect on the agricultural mind, like the application of caustic to "proud flesh." The fines excite at the time prodigious discontent in the crowded room when the court sits. Shouts and groans of remonstrance burst from the lips of the sufferers, and sometimes, we fear, curses both loud and deep. Nevertheless, it never enters into a farmer's brain to attempt to resist the fine ; partly because he has not the remotest idea how he could effectually do so, and partly because he knows that it will probably be his neighbour's turn next. For the lash of the chairman falls in all directions, and companions in misfortune abound. In the particular court we speak of, no regular surveyors were appointed

to view the state of the rivers, ditches, and sea-defences, and to report thereon to the commissioners. Such officers were indeed contemplated by the act; but, to avoid expense, a different system had been from time immemorial pursued. A jury of farmers was appointed to view and report upon the state of the "banks, rivers, sewers, guts, gotes, calcies, bridges, tunnels, culverts, sluices, floodgates, tumbling-bays, cuts," constructed for defending and securing lands, tenements, &c., "against the irruption or overflowing of the sea, or for draining and carrying off superfluous fresh waters."

Now the level of Okenham was divided into two districts, called the dry level and the wet level, and accordingly one jury of farmers was appointed to view the dry level, and another to view the wet level; and in order to excite wholesome competition, and promote a watchful animosity advantageous to the public interests, the jury who viewed the wet level was always chosen from farmers living in the dry level, and *vice versâ*. Consequently between these two juries—the wet jury and the dry jury—there was waged a perpetual warfare of the most alarming description. If the wet jury, in their survey of the rivers and sea-defences of the dry level, reported an unusual number of farmers as liable

to be fined for neglect of the work of cleaning or repairing which fell to their share, loud was the uproar at the Court of Sewers when the recommendation of the wet jury was confirmed, as confirmed it invariably was, by the chairman—bitter the reproaches—dark the threats—indignant the execrations. But what is more ; when the season came round for the *dry jury* to view the *wet level*, terrible was the revenge exacted ! The farmers of the wet level writhed in anguish under the fines inflicted, and prodigious was the uproar at the next Court of Sewers when this return match between the two juries was finally played out, amidst discordant shouts from all quarters of the room, the frantic knocking of the chairman's hammer, and the mutual dissatisfaction of all parties.

We have omitted one great object of a Court of Sewers. Some persons indeed say it is *the* great object. This is the general promotion of sociability in the district. What we have hitherto described may not have struck the reader as especially favourable to this object. But we will now proceed to part of the proceedings bearing on this point, and without which we fear the whole system of Courts of Sewers would totter to its fall, and England be in danger of partial submersion beneath the waters of the ocean and the streams from the hill-

sides. This department, then, of Courts' of Sewers business consists of a plentiful dinner, served up hot, with abundance of ale, and for those who like it, wine or brandy. This concluding scene of the play has a very healing effect on the minds of the performers. Those who have been fined feel the fines go down easily, as an unpleasant pill yields to the gentle impetus of currant-jelly. Those who have quarrelled feel their anger melt away. Those who have been "bored" by the length of the proceedings, revive. Those who have been heavily dozing, awake. Even the "wet and dry juries" are seen hand in glove over their beef and beer, and rival each other in their devotion to the draining of pewter-pots in lieu of marshy land.

To return, however, to the more immediate subject of this chapter, the improvement of the outfall of the little river which received all the drainage of the Okenham level.

The first landowner to put the thing in motion was the Marquis of Swampshire, of whom Nugent rented that part of his farm which was not his own freehold. Now the Marquis of Swampshire was himself put in motion by Nugent, whose lands abutted on one side of the river for a mile or so until it reached the sea. The Marquis knew that Nugent was a good tenant, and was

confident that the land would be vastly improved by the change, and that the money laid out would be well invested. So he went to work in a *degagé* sort of manner, doing the thing irrespective of the Court of Sewers. But had not proceeded far when his agent wrote him word that he was heavily fined by the court, and all the works must be stopped or the fine would be repeated every day until they were. This rather angered the marquis, who drove in state to the next Court of Sewers in a coach and four with two outriders, to inquire what the commissioners could possibly mean. He was received with the most deferential alacrity ; and the room being immensely crowded, insomuch that here and there two commissioners were sitting upon one chair and the dense swarm of honest-looking broad-faced farmers clustered close up to the table at which the chairman was sitting, the marquis was allowed the privilege of an open window, where he was enabled to watch the proceedings with his head and shoulders *out of* the room and the rest of his person *in* the room. He had come rather disposed to astonish the natives by rebuking them for their pig-headedness in obstructing works of improvement. But in five minutes his head was in such a whirl from the clamour of the assemblage, that he began to meditate accidentally falling out of window,

feigning severe injury, and retiring in his coach to the adjoining county.

"Now, then," exclaimed the chairman of the Court of Sewers, a good specimen of the English country gentleman, with a handsome intelligent face, and a good voice, "Jonathan Sludge!—where's Jonathan Sludge?"

"Mr. Jonathan Sludge of Cockleton. Dry level!" echoed the clerk in rather a shrill whistling kind of voice. "Call Mr. Jonathan Sludge!"

"Here, Sludge! Sludge!! Sludge!!!" shouted a dozen farmers all at once, each louder than the other.

"Joney, you be wanted my boy, and, my eye, aren't you going to catch it!" added a stout grazier.

"Come, man, it'll not help thee to skulk home to thy old woman. Thee'lt get as good *there*, as *here*!"—remarked a patriarchal yeoman with his hands in his breeches pockets. This evoked a roar of laughter from the crowd, and "order, order," in a bass voice from the chairman, and a treble from the clerk.

Mr. Jonathan Sludge meantime, with looks of deep resentment and disgust, approached the table of the commissioners.

"Oh, Mr. Sludge!" began the chairman—"you are——"

"How be'ee? Sludge, how be'ee?" here interrupted

one of the commissioners, a well-to-do yeoman living on his own property.

“Order ! order !” exclaimed the chairman, hoarsely.

“Order, order, or—der !” cried the clerk, feebly.

“Hold up thee head—Sludge—and don’t look ashamed of theeself ! Tain’t the first time thee’s’t made a fool of theeself, nor it won’t be the last, Farmer Sludge !” shouted in stentorian voice a huge farmer from the crowd. Shouts, calls to order, and more laughter followed, and were only quelled by the chairman’s rapping the table with his hammer a sufficient time to have driven home the nails of a good-sized coffin.

Silence being once more restored, the chairman proceeded, “Jonathan Sludge !”

“Here I be, Mr. Cheerman. What dost want with I, Mr. Cheerman ?”

“Jonathan Sludge ! You’re fined ten shillings for not mowing the weeds on your bank of the river.”

“Well, I’m blessed !” exclaimed Sludge with solemn amazement.

“That’s a lie—and thee know’s’t it, Joney !” cried the stout grazier. More laughter, more shouts, more hammering at the table.

“You’re fined ten shillings for not doing your river-work—do you hear, Mr. Sludge ?”

“What fur?”

“Why, for not doing your river-work, I tell you.”

“Well, did ye ever hear the likes o’ that, lads? I not do my river-work! Blessed if my work aint better done than ever any fool’s in the wet level ’twixt this and Rentworth—blessed if it aint!”

Wrathful exclamations, retorts, and defiant shouts from various parts of the room, mingled with loud applause from the dry level men.

“Call the foreman of the jury!” exclaimed the chairman.

“The foreman of the wet jury!” reiterated the clerk.

There was a long pause, and at length the chairman exclaimed.

“Where *is* that foreman? It’s too bad! I tell you what, gentlemen, if this goes on we must have paid surveyors; we must, indeed—positively we must! Where’s the foreman, I say?”

“Why, here be I, Mr. Cheerman. Here I be where I ought to be, in my shoes!” abruptly replied an elongated gipsy-looking man, who had been standing opposite to the commissioners for the last ten minutes.

“Oh, there you are! Well, Mr. Foreman, Mr. Sludge says his work was done, and that he ought not to be fined.”

"And I say Sludge's work was *not* done"—vociferated the foreman.

"Thou liest! It war," rejoined Sludge.

"Well, Mr. Foreman, are you sworn?"

"Yes, Mr. Cheerman."

"Well, was his work done or not?"

"It warn't, Mr. Cheerman."

"I tell thee—it *be* done, and well done too!"—shouted Sludge.

"Ay, but it wasn't done when we see'd it"—put in another of the jury.

"I tell thee it war!" persisted Mr. Sludge, mumbling a mouthful of curses between his teeth, as if he found it consolatory.

"Sludge, you're fined ten shillings!" pronounced the Chairman.

"Will you pay, Mr. Sludge? or do you prefer further proceedings?" asked the clerk with an insinuating smile, as if, on the whole, he thought Sludge had better take the latter line.

Sludge with an oath declined either alternative, and privately avowing his intention of emigrating to the "diggings," left the room to get refreshment at the bar, from whence he speedily returned with the money in his hand, rather to the discomfiture of the clerk.

After other business was transacted, the Marquis of Swampshire's affair came on.

"You see, my lord," courteously observed the chairman, "we remit the fine. That was merely a form. But if you wish this new cutting to be made, the provisions of the act *must* be complied with."

"I wish," said the marquis, rather languidly, for he was getting oppressed—"I wish you'd take this bothering affair off my hands. Can't you?"

"How so, my lord?"

"Why, you're the commissioners, and have power I presume. Can't you work it out yourselves? It is for the improvement of a whole district, a public benefit, and I had rather give it up to the proper authorities. Here are the maps, levels, and specifications. There's my agent. And there's Mr. Nugent—how are you, Nugent, make my compliments to Mrs. Nugent, will you? There's Mr. Nugent, my esteemed friend and tenant. So that all's quite straight and comfortable."

So saying, his lordship began to look for his hat, in preparation for retiring from the scene.

"Stop, my lord, I am extremely sorry; but the thing's more complicated than your lordship supposes. You see, we shall want a jury. A jury, Mr. Kingcup—is it not so?"

"In every such case direct 'by inquiry and presentment of a jury,' hum—hum—'impanelled, summoned, and returned,' hum—hum—'appear at the court of Sewers, sworn in open court,' hum, hum—'charged to make their inquisition and return their presentment,' hum—hum, 'notice on church-doors,' and 'in newspapers,' hum, hum"—replied the clerk Mr. Kingcup, reading from the Act of Parliament in his hand.

"Here, show the Act to his lordship," added the chairman. "And just hand me 'Woolrych on Sewers,' will you?"

"And the jury's presentment may be traversed—may be traversed," continued the clerk with eyes gleaming as the plot began to thicken—"Here's the Act, my lord; the page is turned down."

"Oh—thank you! you may as well keep it at that end of the table. Then there must be a jury. Well, summon one!" replied his lordship.

"But *you* must set the thing going, my lord: you must apply for a jury—Mr. Kingcup, I say, hand me over Woolrych!"

"And guarantee expenses," murmured the clerk.

"And your lordship must get a majority of three-fourths of all the occupiers in any way affected by the proposed improvements," the chairman went on. "Three-

fourths in *value*, not in numbers. So says the Act, Mr. Kingcup—don't it?"

"Just so, sir, just so."

"Well—but this is a terrible bothering affair! There is no end of small occupiers on the other side of the river, my agent tells me," replied Lord Swampshire. "Really, I can't be bored in this way; really, I can't. I must give it up."

"But cannot the commissioners suggest any simpler course to his lordship," asked Nugent. "It would be a great boon to a large number of industrious farmers if we could improve the drainage of this level. It seems a sort of public work. Cannot the commissioners advise or help us?"

"You see, Mr. Nugent, it is the landowner who should move in the matter, and take all the responsibility and trouble. Employ his private surveyor and solicitor, get out his plans and specifications, canvass all the occupiers to secure support. Then he comes to us, and we on his application summon a jury to view and inquire into the matter, at the expense of the landowner. And then, if all goes well and the jury approve, and three-fourths of the occupiers approve, and the jury's presentment is not upset on appeal, why then, you see, we levy a rate, and the thing 'begins to move.'"

"Well—but suppose the landowner is unsuccessful—all the preliminary expense falls on him?"

"Oh! of course—unquestionably!"

Upon which Lord Swampshire put on his hat and made for the door, but was again stopped by the chairman, who, by dint of poring over the Act, had come to the conclusion that the court, though it could not execute entirely new works, might improve old works without the consent of three-fourths of the occupiers, provided a jury made a presentment that such improvements would be beneficial to the lands affected. Nevertheless, experienced as the chairman was and possessed of abilities above the average, he propounded his opinion with some degree of doubt, and looked as if he rather expected to be contradicted.

A long discussion ensued, but without any definite result; and, as the smell of dinner began to ooze into the room, it was moved and seconded that the meeting be adjourned for a month to give time for inquiry and consideration.

The end of it was that the commissioners found out that in the case of improving old works such as widening or deepening rivers, the consent of three-fourths of the occupiers in writing was not requisite, but simply the presentment of a jury. This being finally admitted,

the Marquis of Swampshire consented to put the matter in motion, provided Nugent would, in consideration of the sum of one thousand pounds, undertake to carry the matter through on his own risk, engaging not to trouble his lordship more and pay any further sums required out of his own pocket. As the surveyor calculated the total cost of the improvements would be considerably under the sum advanced by Lord Swampshire, Nugent believed himself justified in closing with the offer, trusting to his own vigilant superintendence to save himself from loss or injury.

The work then at length commenced, and before many weeks elapsed had made considerable progress. The old river was deepened and widened, the stones and clay carted away, the bridges, where necessary, underpinned and strengthened. The most important part of the operation—namely, the enlarging the outfall of the river at the sea-wall, and providing wider flood-gates—was, however, only partially completed. Therefore, as the spring tides were coming on, great care was required to shore up and support the new masonry in which the flood-gates were fixed, lest the pressure of the sea should break it down. The slightest warping of the work would infallibly result in a total smash. The sea would burst in, and not merely cause much mischief

to the farmers, by poisoning the ditches and watering-places for cattle with salt water ; but, unless checked betimes, flood a portion of the low lands and inflict damage which it would require several years to remedy.

Now it was at this critical time that Gertrude one afternoon drove her pony carriage to Beaumont-house for the purpose of having some conversation with her mother, partly on the subject of certain new patterns of silks just sent down by post from London, partly upon matters which were secretly vexing her mind and making her anxious and low.

The silks having been duly examined, poised in the hand, held up to the light, stretched out on various articles of furniture, and finally folded up and laid aside, Gertrude sidled up to Lady Maud on the sofa, and said—

“Mamma, dear, I wish to have a few more words on the old subject——”

“Well, darling child, by all means. I hope you now see the force of what I urged the other day.”

“I have been thinking it over and over, mamma, till I get quite puzzled. You say that I take Oliver’s absence too quietly, and don’t make enough fuss about it.”

“Certainly, darling ! How can you suppose a man will

ever believe in the intensity of a wife's affection unless she not merely *feels* but *shows* distress, vexation—yes, even indignation—at his abandoning her society for that of others? Mind,” added Lady Maud emphatically, “I am always supposing he is really full of affection towards the woman. If there is any coldness or languor, another course must be pursued. He must be stimulated by neglect or brusque indifference. But in Nugent's case it is not want of affection——”

“Oh no!” said Gertrude, for one second glancing at her pretty face in the opposite mirror. “I don't doubt his attachment to me. I think he loves me. Really I do!”

“Exactly so, dear! But he allows everyday business to absorb too much of his time, and he's a little thoughtless; or rather, I should say, phlegmatic—phlegmatic,” repeated Lady Maud—“That I think is the word.”

“And you think I should try to rouse him, dear mamma?”

“Unquestionably! For if you take his little forgetfulnesses quietly, how is he to know he's to blame? How is he to know you take to heart his frequent separations from you?”

Gertrude sat for a few minutes in silent thought.

“You see, dear mamma,” she then began, “I have not your winning, soft ways. It is quite the old story of

the poor donkey trying to imitate the pet dog. If I show unusual *empressement* I shall only be clumsy and awkward."

"Try, dearest—try! For instance, here is Sir Reginald staying with us on a visit. He is paying much attention to your sister, Agatha, and ought to be encouraged."

"Agatha!" exclaimed Gertrude—"I thought Mr. Lovell——"

"And ought to be encouraged," repeated Lady Maud with a little alteration in her voice, and that faint quiver of light from her eyes, which was generally the sign of her feeling displeased.

"And ought to be encouraged. Now at luncheon to-day, I shall propose a riding party for to-morrow, and beg you to be one, and to bring Nugent with you."

"But, suppose he positively refuses?"

"Why then, you foolish little thing, you must be *angry*—downright *angry*;" answered her mother, playfully patting her daughter's cheek with a *papier mâché* paper-knife.

"Oh! but that makes Oliver so sad for a week afterwards—not cross, but sad."

"Well, then, be a *little* angry, dear—show yourself to be in *earnest*; that is all I mean. You are too *insouciant* with him. He requires to be stirred up.

But there's the gong for luncheon, and we must join the others."

Now, motherly advice is a very excellent thing before marriage, and indeed after marriage too if great caution and delicacy be observed in imparting it. But the fact is, the best things can be overdone, and Gertrude had had more than enough of Lady Maud's instruction in the petty difficulties of life before she gave her hand to Nugent.

Naturally warm-hearted and affectionate, with an active and intelligent mind, she was disposed to place confidence in those about her and to act with openness and decision, but her mother's training had to some extent affected her character; and, though she was by no means fond of manœuvring and *finessing*, she was apt to take refuge in such resources when any serious difficulty crossed her path. On the present occasion, the remedy for her husband's real or imaginary negligence did not prove entirely successful. Certainly, Nugent was induced to abandon his engagements for the day, but not precisely for the reason Gertrude wished. She had followed Lady Maud's advice pretty correctly. She first tried to inveigle Nugent to ride with her by soft gentle little petitions, whispered into his ear as they sat on the sofa sipping their

coffee after dinner. But Nugent replied very decidedly, although with many expressions of regret, that it was out of the question. He *must* ride to the outfall of the river to see the new works, and look after the men, for the juncture was critical. Gertrude, who could not understand why the bailiff would not do as well, tried another mode of address, which may be termed the "tenderly-reproachful line." And this not answering any better, she passed into the "tearfully-morbid mood." From which the transition was easy into the "affectionately-indignant attitude." Finally, she really worked herself into a state of mind her mother would have highly approved. With flashing eyes and crimson cheeks she sprang from the sofa, and, standing erect before him, said with much emphasis—

"Very well! This is the first favour I have asked of you since our marriage, and it shall be the last. I wish you good-night, sir!" And immediately hurried out of the room, leaving Nugent, half-stupefied with astonishment, and entirely miserable.

Ought he to yield to her? As a matter of duty he ought not. It was very unreasonable—it was selfish of her to insist on his leaving an important matter admitting of no delay, for the sake of a foolish riding expedition which might take place at any time. He

would talk the thing over with her quietly to-morrow, and endeavour to induce her to admit that he was in the right.

After luncheon then on the following day, Nugent affectionately put his arm round his wife's waist, and leading her out into the lawn sat down with her under the huge fir-tree in front of her boudoir, and began kindly but earnestly to point out to her the unreasonableness of her conduct the night before. He had not, however, gone further than to explain that it was really a matter of duty he should personally visit the outfall at a certain time that day, and had only made a very faint impression on Gertrude, vexed as she was both with him and herself, when the iron gate in front of the house was heard to swing on its hinges, followed by the sound of horses' hoofs on the gravel drive.

"There they are!" exclaimed Gertrude, rising, and was hurrying away to dress, when Nugent, reconnoitring through the trees, exclaimed—

"Why, I see only Sir Reginald and a groom! Where are the rest of the party? Surely you are not going to ride alone?"

Gertrude said she would go round to the front door and inquire. After a moment's absence she returned, exclaiming—

"Oh! Agatha's horse has cut his foot, and can't be ridden. It is very tiresome."

"I suppose, then, you will not go?" said Nugent.

"Go! Why not?" asked Gertrude, opening her blue eyes rather widely. "The Clairs expect us at three o'clock, and mamma will be there in the carriage. I *promised* to be there."

"But, darling," continued Nugent, "I particularly wish you should not go. I have my reasons."

The colour mounted to Gertrude's cheeks. What did he possibly mean?

"I do not approve of your rushing into a sudden friendship with Clinton," Nugent hurriedly added. "I like my cousin; he has many fine qualities, but he is a Roman Catholic. In a crowd I do not mind; but any thing like intimacy—*tête-à-tête* walks or drives, I disapprove—at all events, till we have seen more of him."

"Ridiculous!" rejoined Gertrude, "I never heard of such a thing! Your own cousin, too! And mamma has known him from a boy! Ridiculous!"

Nugent only answered gently but firmly—

"I am sorry to interfere with your little excursion. I am very sorry. But I really mean what I say."

"Well, I am to stay at home, then—am I?"

"It is my wish, dearest Gertrude."

"If you *command* me, of course I must obey. But nothing in the world shall keep me at home but a downright *command*, and I do not think you're quite tyrant enough for that," replied Gertrude, endeavouring, but without success, to smile.

Nugent was greatly vexed.

"Go, dear, and put on your habit," he said shortly.

Gertrude did not like the tone of his voice, but thought it best, having gone so far, to persevere, inwardly resolving to ride only a short distance and then return to Nugent. In a few minutes she descended to the front door, where her horse was waiting, and, after exchanging a friendly greeting with Clinton who lifted her lightly into the saddle, she put her horse into a canter and rapidly traversed the park with Clinton by her side. On emerging into the road, however, they were joined by another horseman. It was Nugent, who had hastily gone to the stables, sent orders to his bailiff Maddocks to go to the outlet instead of himself, and, mounting his horse, galloped round by the back lane in time to intercept the party.

His countenance was anxious and sad, whilst a slight flush lingered on his cheek. Gertrude herself felt hot and uncomfortable. In short, Sir Reginald Clinton perceived in a moment that some little domestic *contre-*

temps had occurred, and that the ride was not likely to be of the most agreeable description. As a man of the world, however, he made the best of it, by talking fluently on whatever topic came uppermost, and averting his eyes, as far as it was possible without constraint, from the faces of his companions.

Nevertheless it must be acknowledged he was not very successful in placing either his cousin or Gertrude at their ease. The former was deeply wounded. The latter was irritated and unhappy. She was displeased with herself, and yet provoked at what she deemed her husband's perversity. He had joined the riding party indeed, but why? Not in compliance with affectionate solicitations, or passionate remonstrances, but simply to prevent her riding *tête-à-tête* with Sir Reginald Clinton. It was most vexatious!

Lady Maud, when they met at the Clairs, smiled bland approval and encouragement; but Gertrude responded only by a look of mingled weariness and dejection. After quitting the Clairs, the riding-party took their way homeward by a short cut across the high land overhanging the sea, for the sky was overcast and there seemed every probability of a storm.

The spring-tide was coming in strong and fresh, and the crested waves broke on the shingles with a

roar like thunder. From the heights where the party were riding, a long stretch of coast was visible ; and as the waves advanced with steady tread like the march of an innumerable army, the beach narrowed more and more until little was visible save the heaving surface of dusky-green waters, flecked and fringed, as far as the eye could reach, with snow-white lines of undulating foam. Overhead, the clouds swept in broken masses; but towards the horizon now growing dim and misty, they gathered into dark mountainous ridges. A few rain-drops now and then fell on the faces of the riders, and more than one white seagull skimmed along the edge of the cliff as if in search of shelter.

Nugent's face began to express anxiety. He often turned his head as they rode forwards as if to listen. The outlet of the river was not more than a mile distant, but was hid from sight by a projecting hill. Gertrude knew too well whither his thoughts were running, but decided there was nothing for it but to push on as fast as possible towards home.

Clinton, who had been conversing with Nugent on the subject of the outlet, and saw his evident anxiety of mind, here pointed to a small declivitous lane which appeared to lead down to the seashore, and exclaimed—

“ Here, Nugent, that looks like a way down to the

water. Why don't you turn off there, and see how matters are going on? I will escort Mrs. Nugent safely home I assure you. He can trust to me, cannot he, Mrs. Nugent?"—he added, turning towards Gertrude who for her part tried to look as much at her ease as possible.

Nugent, who was not much of a hand at commanding his countenance, looked confused. To leave Gertrude now would seem inconsistent. It would look like sacrificing his religious scruples to his pecuniary interests. No, he would not leave them.

A sudden light flashed over Clinton's pale, delicately-sculptured features, as he quietly looked from one to the other of his companions. It was not surprise, nor was it pity, nor was it amusement; but an expression compounded of all three, and that scarcely discernible to any but a close observer. He checked his horse, and said carelessly—"I tell you what, cousin, I'll e'en have a look myself at this wonderful outlet of yours. I begin to take an interest in it."

And, so saying, he touched his horse with the spur, and rode down the lane we have just mentioned with rather more rapidity than ordinary riders would have thought prudent. As he lost sight of the Nugents, a spectator might have noticed the expression we have alluded to

again flash over Clinton's face, but this time more distinctly.

"Poor man!" he murmured to himself—"poor lady! Is it possible? Well, I would not willingly hurt them. No, were my heart ever so deeply touched, I have enough on my conscience already!" And, so saying, the smile passed from his face, and he pressed closer to his heart a small crucifix, which hung suspended from his neck beneath his dress. But at this moment, as his horse suddenly turned the corner of the hill, and the broad sea once more opened before him setting strongly in-shore, he distinctly heard, amidst the increasing uproar of the waves, repeated screams for help at no great distance along the beach. Gathering up his reins, with a sudden glow of energy and resolution, he spurred his horse forwards at full speed in the direction from whence the sounds seemed to come.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST OR SAVED.

THE bailiff, Maddocks, to whom Nugent had committed the oversight of the works at the outlet of the river Oke, remained at his post till the labourers were compelled by the advancing tide to strike off work, and collect their tools preparatory for going homewards. First, however, with every possible care the men examined the new masonry, and, to avoid any damage likely to arise from the unusual stress of the tide, fixed additional planks and props to shore it up, and make all secure.

Maddocks himself purposed to remain until the tide had turned, in order to be able to report to his master that all was right, as well as to guard against possible accident. He therefore paced slowly up and down on the sea-wall abutting on the masonry of the outlet, watching the vast breadth of sea roaring and foaming up the beach nearer and nearer every minute. The

wind was, as we have said, blowing stiffly in-shore, and it was as much as the bailiff could do to keep sometimes on his legs. The sea to windward was almost black, and there was a distant muttering of thunder. The man, who was almost as anxious as his master about the success of the works, began to feel a misgiving as to the ability of the new wall and flood-gates to resist the violence of the waves. He left the sea-wall, and walked along the bank of the river to a spot about a hundred yards from the outlet, where a temporary dam had been commenced under Nugent's directions, in order that, in case of the outlet works giving way, there might be still an obstacle to the stream of the in-rushing tide. This dam was an immense mass of stones, clay, and timber, and, had it been completed, would have resisted any influx of the tide for a considerable time. But, to make it effectual, two or three hours' more labour was necessary. It struck Maddocks, that as the weather was rough, and the tide running strong, it would be a wise precaution to set the men to work to finish the dam before the night shut in, and the tide was at the full. Accordingly he hastened after the workmen, hoping to overtake them before they had reached home, and bring them back to the river.

Now, whilst Maddocks had been pacing up and down,

watching the rising of the tide, two men sat, or rather crouched side by side, beneath the walls of a deserted old lime-kiln in the field adjoining the river. They were both poorly and coarsely clad, but one of the men was more disreputable in general appearance than the other, being begrimed with dirt, whilst his companion, though in much the same sort of attire, was comparatively clean and decent.

"Thou art a poor coward, Master Weston!" said the worst-looking of the two. "A poor coward!" and, as he uttered the words, the man turned the quid of tobacco he was chewing from one side of his mouth to the other, and spat on the ground with emphasis, as if he rather wished Master Weston's face had received the compliment. "A poor coward! But, as it giv me the pleasure of another look at thy ugly phiz, I mustn't find fault with thee."

"Harrill, I'm thinking you would have run, too, if you saw your dead wife's face peer over the wall yonder all of a sudden!"

"What, Madge's? Not I!" said the man, rubbing his bristly chin with the palm of his large, coarse hand in a reflective and meditative mood. "Not I! Oh, what a precious walloping I did give her a month afore she kicked the bucket!"

Weston, although not unaccustomed to his friend's eccentricities, seemed slightly disgusted at this pleasing reminiscence.

"Not as how," continued Harrill conscientiously, "Madge hadn't her good points. She could make and mend, and she cooked like a good 'un when there was aught to cook. But she'd too much tongue. That's what ruins half the women in England."

So saying, Harrill paused as if oppressed by the extent and magnitude of the evil, and then added, with a quiet chuckle—

"She'd scold till I whopped her, and then she'd scream till I left off. That warn't considerate, Master Weston—war it now?"

"Well, poor thing! she's cold in her grave," remarked Weston.

"So she be!" rejoined Harrill, again spitting on the ground. "So she be! Let bygones be bygones. I don't bear malice, not I." For a moment or two they turned their attention towards Maddocks, and Harrill exclaimed with an oath, "That beast ain't gone yet. 'Twill be a bad look-out for him if he sticks there till after dark. Why, thou'rt shaking, man"—he added, turning to Weston—"Thou'rt shaking like a sheep with the staggers. Here, take a sup of this!" and, so saying, handed him

a flask of rum. Weston took a good drink, and appeared considerably revived.

"I wish," said Weston, growing more communicative as the fiery liquid coursed through his veins—"I wish I had never seen that fellow's face again."

"What, Clinton's?" asked Harrill, carelessly tossing off the remainder of the rum.

"Yes, Sir Reginald's. I was doing well enough at Okingham. Had my little shop. And patients were dropping in."

"And dropping off, I'll be bound, thou old quack!" interposed his friend.

"I was doing pretty well with my drugs, and my lectures, and what not. When all of a sudden down comes Sir Reginald to Beaumont-house, and cut I must, or he would nab me to a certainty."

"May be he'd be glad to hear news of his poor missus that was," said Harrill, with a grin.

"I've heard," continued Weston, who seemed to be talking more for his own satisfaction than Harrill's; "I've heard he's an altered man. It won't do for me to be far out of his way. He might have a weakness for the boy, and there's not a soul but you or me can tell him where he is! I must skulk in this neighbourhood for the present, though I can't say I feel comfortable."

"Well, 'tis a good job for I, for it's put a little cash in my pocket," remarked Harrill. "And 'twill put a little more, won't it, old quack—I say, won't it?" So saying, he gave Weston a friendly gripe on the knee, which made him wince with pain.

"You know, Harrill—you know I've barely enough to live on. Remember there's two of us. Sister Lucy and I, we've a bare twenty pound a year to live on. Why, it's nothing."

Harrill thrust his hands into his pockets, and indignantly exclaimed—

"Hold that jaw, Master Weston. Sister Lucy's at service with the squire, and thou canst get thy living in a dozen ways, I tell thee. I'll not stand this gammon any longer. If thou'll't sell some of this railway stock—good. If not, I'll split—I'll go straight to Sir Reginald, and split."

"But you know, my good Harrill, I can't sell without my sister signs the papers as well as I."

"Make her, then, thou great fool ; or I tell thee I'll split !" emphatically repeated Harrill.

Weston's countenance darkened, but it was evident that he stood in dread of his companion, and felt for some reason more or less in his power. He said nothing, but looked anxiously towards the sea.

"I don't mind"—said Harrill after a pause, as if he were making a great concession—

"I don't mind if I marry thy sister. There, now!"

And, so saying, Harrill raised his bleared eyes to enjoy the agreeable sensation produced in his companion by so handsome an offer.

"I hate jesting on such subjects," hastily replied Weston, whilst his light grey eyes kindled with anger.

"Thou'rt a fool for thy pains!—a fool, I say!" Harrill repeated, raising his voice to an angry snarl, and frowning laboriously, in order to reduce his companion to a more humble frame of mind—"A fool, I say!"

"There—there! that's enough," said Weston; "let's talk of something else. Look how the spray flies over the sea-wall! You can see it a mile away."

Harrill was about to rejoin in no very courteous style, when his eye caught the figure of the bailiff, Maddocks, hastily descending the sea-wall, and from thence making across the field towards the gate through which the labourers had passed about an hour before.

"The beast's going!" he cried. "Now for it! Give us the pickaxe, doctor, and come along." So saying, he sallied forth from the limekiln followed by Weston, who, however, would evidently have much rather remained where he was.

"Well!" exclaimed Harrill, with an oath; "I thought that brute would stick to the wall yonder like a limpet. Howsoever he's gone, and, if he hadn't, I'd a' cracked his skull, or slit his gullet for him! Ain't this jolly, my old humbug—eh?" he added, giving Weston a slap on his back which made him reel.

"I can't quite see the necessity of this new spree of yours," answered Weston, stepping a little beyond the reach of Harrill's hand. "It seems useless danger, and useless mischief."

"Thou liest—like a fool as thou art, mun! Danger! Who cares? Mischief! Why, that's the fun of it. Think of drowning Squire Nugent's nice fat pastures! It's jolly—I say it's jolly!" shouted Harrill, bringing his face so close to Weston's that it almost touched. "I say it's jolly! Didn't the squire send I to prison for starving Madge?—didn't he, I say? And didn't he lay me flat on my back on the highway?—didn't he, I say? And didn't he chase me with his infernal yeomanry?—didn't he, I say?"

Weston did not reply, and Harrill went on.

"He thowt to stand up for Madge. But didn't I wallop her the more for it? Oh, what a precious wallop I guv her a month afore she died! Didn't I,

though ?" and the man laughed an inward, quiet laugh, not pleasant to listen to.

By this time they had reached the banks of the river, which flowed slowly and gently towards the fast-closing flood-gates, and contrasted strongly with the roar and tumult of the sea outside. The water in the river was low, and what there was of it was choked by rubbish accumulated during the progress of the recent works, as well as by fragments of rock which had lain at the bottom from time immemorial, and now peeped above the sluggish stream, dark with clinging weeds and slimy moss. Here and there the black stems and rotting branches of trees, washed down in rainy seasons, lay in contorted shapes, half emerging from the trickling water, half buried in the foul and treacherous mud. There was a look of desolation and decay along the half-empty bed of the river, which struck a chill into Weston's heart. But Harrill meantime, armed with a crow-bar and pickaxe, had let himself down to the bed of the river just beneath the new flood-gates, where, standing on a rough platform formed of slabs of trees, he called on Weston not to stand staring there like a fool, but to come and lend a hand; and so saying commenced knocking away the props, and wrenching out the planks which shored up the new masonry, with all the energy

he could muster. Weston, who by no means liked the job, thought it as well to make a show of assisting Harrill, and looked about for a place to descend. The newly-pared banks of the widened river were smooth and slippery. He did not like the look of them, and went towards the wall under which Harrill was at work, to see if he could get down. But that worthy by this time seemed to think the job was completed; for scrambling out from the midst of the planks and logs of wood which he had been busied in pulling down, he climbed up the wall, and, with a grin of delighted expectation, watched the waves come rolling heavily against the massive, but as yet unseasoned, masonry of the outlet. The two men stood for some time expecting the coming crash, but the masonry stubbornly held out. Here and there a thin stream of water spun through the inner joints of the wall after an unusually strong wave had broken against its outer face, but there was no perceptible yielding of the work.

Harrill grew impatient. He cursed and swore at the river, at the walls, at Nugent, at Weston, at himself. At length, perceiving that one prop still remained, fixed against one of the abutments of the masonry, which he had omitted to remove, with a look of hungry impatience he slid down the wall once more, to knock the prop away.

"Have a care!" shouted Weston. "The wall's going! The wall's going! The wall's going!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the solid wall burst apart from crown to base, and with the roar of an avalanche toppled over into the bed of the river, followed by the spouting, boiling, eddying waves of the in-rushing sea. Harrill by a desperate effort escaped the falling mass of masonry, but it was only to find himself engulfed in the deep torrent of water which in an instant filled the bed of the river, and swept fiercely onwards, bearing with it planks, and beams, and branches of trees, spinning round and round in its rapid eddies. For a few moments the wretched man was entirely lost to sight, but rose to the surface some fifty yards up the stream, making wild efforts to swim.

At first Weston stood motionless on the brink of the river, whilst the words—"Thank Heaven, I am free at last!" burst from his lips. But when he saw Harrill rise exhausted to the surface, saw his last feeble struggles for life, and heard, distinctly above the howling of the wind and waves, his hoarse scream for help, he sprang forward in a frenzy of pity and alarm, eager to give him succour even at the risk of his own safety. He ran along the bank shouting and screaming for assistance, and flinging into the

rolling torrent planks, hurdles, any thing that he thought would float.

At that juncture, a horseman well mounted galloped down the lane leading into the field of which we have just spoken, and, without pausing to open the gate, gathered up his horse's reins, and took him over it at a flying leap.

Weston pointed imploringly at the river, shouting loudly. "A man in the water, sir! A man drowning! Save him, save him!"

Clinton pulled up his horse, and, turning towards the stream, caught sight of Harrill's head, surging for the last time out of the rushing stream.

The water was now flowing more steadily, but still with rapid and dangerous violence. For a moment Clinton hesitated. Then fearlessly urged his horse with a decision and vigour the animal knew and appreciated, over the bank, and into the midst of the gurgling waters, which now threatened to flood the field. The powerful horse bore up bravely, whilst Clinton, guiding him athwart the current vainly strove to catch sight of the drowning man.

Meantime Weston, as if driven by some irresistible impulse, fled with all his speed away from the river towards the furthest extremity of the field, where, break-

ing with reckless energy through the hedge, he leapt the ditch on the other side and was soon out of sight.

Clinton, seeing nothing more of the man in the water, now guided his horse to shore. The horse, nothing loth, struck his forefeet into the bank, and strove to scramble up; but his hoofs slipped from the slimy clay as if it had been glass, and man and horse were once more plunged into the stream. Clinton with spur and rein, and with words of hearty encouragement, once more urged his horse up the bank. The animal, with dilated nostril and panting flank, and every muscle strained, struggled hard to gain a footing, and had almost succeeded when suddenly the girths gave way, the saddle slipped round, and Clinton was precipitated into the stream.

The current was so strong that for a moment he was whirled away into the middle of the stream, and could with difficulty keep his head above water. By a desperate effort, however, and aided by a bend in the river, he succeeded in reaching the bank, and, clinging hold of the coarse flags and rushes growing there, contrived to raise his head and shoulders out of the water, and to save himself from being washed away. Nevertheless, the situation was precarious. At the smallest effort to draw himself further upwards, the rushes and grass to which he clung began to give way.

Exhausted as he was, Clinton could only faintly call out for help, and cling with quiet desperation to the yielding herbage overhanging the bank. He now heard with perfect distinctness the voices of men at no great distance, and presently his own name mentioned in a careless manner by Nugent, who asked if Sir Reginald had passed that way. The voices grew fainter as if those who spoke were going away, and still Clinton called in vain, for his strength was failing, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; whilst the very exertion of crying out gave a strain to the flags and rushes to which he was clinging, and loosened their roots more and more. At that instant Clinton's horse, which had succeeded in getting to land further up the stream, came galloping back along the field, keeping close to the river side, and, as if conscious that his master's life was at stake, pursued his course not homewards, but towards Nugent and the men with whom he was talking. The water streamed from his smoking flanks as he wildly galloped towards them, and then, wheeling round, galloped back towards the river.

"Clinton's horse!" exclaimed Nugent; and then, shouting to his men to follow him, ran with all his speed towards the river. Now Nugent and the men were on the opposite bank of the stream, having crossed

by means of a rude but substantial bridge, composed of a trunk of a huge elm split in two, and wedged firmly into the shore at each end. As soon, therefore, as their attention was directed towards the river, they caught sight of Clinton clinging to the bank on the opposite side. Nugent, shouting to him to hold on, ran swiftly round by the bridge, and had reached him before his workmen had crossed it. The next moment Clinton's wrist was seized with the grasp of a vice, and the horror of his situation vanished from his mind like a frightful dream.

With the aid of the labourers, Nugent dragged Clinton out of the water, and up the slippery bank, and no sooner saw him safely seated on the ground than he seized his hand and pressed it with affection, as if it was he, and not Clinton, whose part it was to be grateful. Clinton silently returned the pressure; and, whilst the men threw some additional clothing over him, and fetched him some brandy from a farm-house not far distant, he hurriedly described what he had witnessed on first reaching the river bank—the drowning man engulfed in the rushing torrent whom he had vainly striven to rescue—and suggested that labourers should be sent up the stream, on the chance of finding him whether alive or dead.

Whilst, then, Nugent despatched his people in various directions, not only up the stream, but to the villages round, in order to spread the alarm, and procure additional assistance—an inundation of this kind being likely to cause grievous injury to the tenant-farmers in all the lowlands round—Clinton might be seen to take from his breast the small crucifix already noticed, and press it fervently to his lips. Cold and wet as he was, it was, however, necessary he should hasten homewards, and Nugent, with evident sincerity, pressed him to put up at the Manor Farm. This, however, Clinton steadily refused, and only asked for the loan of Nugent's horse, his own being thoroughly dead beat. Then, as soon as he was in the saddle, he added—

“By the bye, what has become of the fellow who was shouting for help as I rode down the lane? I don't see him any where.”

“That is rather important,” answered Nugent. “It was not one of my own men, and my bailiff is confident there has been some foul play at the outlet. Should you know the man again?”

“I only glanced at him for a moment. He was shabbily dressed, but it seemed to me that I had seen his face before; but where, I cannot remember.”

"Well!" cried Nugent, "you must make haste home. We can talk of this another time."

They shook hands once more, and parted. Clinton, drenched to the skin with sea-water, and wearied in body and mind, galloped home at full speed, and was soon seated by the library fire at Beaumont-house, in dry clothes, with a tumbler of mulled wine specially prescribed by Lady Maud, on the table before him. To her he related, as well as he could, the catastrophe at the river mouth, the death of the strange man, and his own narrow escape. Lady Maud, after devoting a sufficient time to expressions of regret and sympathy, retired to dress for dinner. Her brow was clouded, and her manner unusually absent and perturbed. She had gathered from Gertrude, in the course of two or three minutes' hasty conversation at the Clairs, that Nugent had accompanied her that morning, not from any anxiety to oblige her, but from quite a different motive.

What that motive was she had not distinctly understood, but surmised that it was jealousy—a growing jealousy of Sir Reginald Clinton. Yet, whatever was the motive of Nugent's attending his wife that day, one thing was certain, that the calamity at the river mouth would be ascribed to his absence from the spot at so critical a juncture. Gertrude would have to bear the

blame of the whole misfortune. It would be all laid at her door. And yet she had only followed the earnest injunctions of an affectionate mother. With all her faults, Lady Maud was fond of her children. She was vexed and uneasy to think her daughter would be bitterly upbraided by Nugent for what had occurred that day.

"I must go to the poor child's aid," she said to herself, as she went down-stairs to join the company. "It will be hard if I cannot break the force of her husband's displeasure, even if I come in for a share of it myself. I think I can manage him. Oliver Nugent must indeed be changed, if I cannot."

Then, having despatched a note to her daughter, containing a few words of sympathy and encouragement, and a promise to call the next morning, or come that very night if Gertrude preferred, she floated into the drawing-room with a countenance once more serene and undisturbed.

Meanwhile Nugent and his men, aided by farmers and labourers from other parts of the valley, worked hard to check and mitigate the serious disaster which had occurred. Fortunately the wind chopped round at the turn of the tide, and then it fell calm.

A portion only of the marsh land was flooded by the

sea-water, and the rapid subsidence of the tide left the pasture injured indeed, but not to any great extent. Out of many of the ditches not immediately connected with the river Oke, the men succeeded in penning back the sea water. The cattle and sheep were for the most part safely removed out of the meadows situated on the lowest level, now sheeted with a lake of sea-water. A heifer or two was carried away by the stream, and a few sheep drowned in the ditches. Some hay was spoiled, and more damaged; whilst several acres of after-grass was for the present rendered worthless.

But when morning dawned, and found Nugent, surrounded by his men and a large number of the country people from the neighbourhood, seated at a long table in the large barn at the back of the Manor-house, with a plentiful breakfast spread before them, well earned by the exertions of the previous night, there were general exclamations of gratitude and satisfaction at the comparatively small amount of injury sustained by the irruption of the sea. The chief expense would be the reconstruction of the heavy stone-work at the outlet, and this would not probably exceed between two and three hundred pounds. Nevertheless, there was not much time for rest or refreshment. Relays of men worked hard all the morning to construct a temporary dam to

pen back the advancing tide. The weather being calm, and the tide not rising so high, this task was successfully accomplished, and all danger was for the present at an end.

During Nugent's absence that night and the following morning, Gertrude had passed her time in much distress of mind. Tears of self-reproach and of vain regret coursed each other down her cheeks as she walked up and down the drawing-room, occasionally throwing herself on the sofa to take a little rest, occasionally summoning her maid to inquire what was the last intelligence received from the scene of the disaster. Thus the night wore on, and when morning broke, Gertrude thoroughly tired out was glad to lie down dressed as she was outside her bed, and was soon fast asleep. It is uncertain whether she could have been induced to consult her comfort even thus far had not a few lines from Nugent, hastily written in pencil, informed her that all was going on well, and the mischief less important than was at first feared. As for Nugent his own thoughts, strange as it may seem, were far less bitter and painful than previous to the destruction of the outlet works. The loss of a few hundred pounds was certainly vexatious, but not seriously inconvenient. The temporary check to his improvements in the river,

and the mortification always attaching to failure, however undeserved, were evils rather more trying, but yet pretty sure to be speedily rectified. On the other hand, he felt involuntary consolation in feeling that events had justified the firmness of his original resolution to devote himself at so critical a juncture to the superintendence of the outlet works, instead of complying with his wife's request that he would accompany her in her ride to the Clairs. Events had justified his refusal: he was placed in a position of superiority: he had put his wife under an obligation: he felt soothed and comforted at the thought, and, had it not been for the death of the man drowned near the river mouth, he would have positively rejoiced that the accident had occurred.

Nugent returned homewards, then, after the labours of the night and of the morning, stiff and weary in body, but with a mind cheered and tranquil. His great anxiety was to see Gertrude, press her to his heart, and assure her of his entire forgiveness. He would, he thought, affectionately interrupt her expressions of contrition: beg her to say nothing further on the subject: propose that the present misfortune should be a starting-point, from which to recommence their wedded life with greater confidence in each other, and with more patient and unflinching affection.

What might have been the result of this line of conduct, had nothing untoward prevented it, it is difficult to say. Possibly as Nugent anticipated, it might have healed the wounds inflicted by recent misunderstandings, and drawn their hearts more closely and truly together. Possibly the result might have been transient, and so have failed to arrest the progress of an evil which had in so short a time taken such deep root. However that may be, the experiment, as our readers will see, was never fairly put to the test, and therefore its possible consequences remain a matter of conjecture.

Nugent then returned to the Manor Farm fatigued, but tolerably light of heart. He observed, however, with a slight feeling of annoyance, that the Usherwood carriage was waiting at the front door, and on entering the house was told that Lady Maud was in the drawing-room, desirous of speaking to him.

He sent word that he would do so as soon as he had seen Gertrude ; but, on going up to her bed-room, he found her sleeping soundly, and, fearful of disturbing her, did not venture beyond the threshold of the door. Had he done so, had he been able to see how pale and tearful was her countenance even in sleep, his heart would certainly have yearned towards her with a tenderness deeper than that which even now possessed him.

He returned, then, to the drawing-room, and having accosted Lady Maud, whose hand for some reason or other appeared to be strangely cold, sank into a chair opposite to her, apologising at the same time for his abruptness on the score of fatigue.

Lady Maud coldly bowed, and, expressing her regret that she should be compelled to intrude upon him, went on, with rather less than her usual composure, as follows—

“It is certainly rather an inopportune moment I have selected to address you, and yet there is no alternative. My dear child will shortly wake, and as it is about her I wish to speak, it is desirable you should hear what I have to say before you meet her.”

Nugent said nothing, but listened with attention, thinking that Lady Maud meant to make excuses for her conduct, and to ask him to pass it over.

“The welfare of both of you,” continued Lady Maud, more firmly, “is at stake; and at the risk, therefore of giving offence, I have thought it right to interfere.”

Nugent bowed courteously. The only thing he did not quite like was Lady Maud’s tone of frigid dignity, so unlike her usual softness of manner. However, he thought to himself, the poor lady is no doubt nervous.

It is rather a trying thing for her. I must put her mind at ease as soon as an opportunity offers.

"Your conduct yesterday," gravely proceeded Lady Maud, "was so cruel and unaccountable——"

Nugent's sunburnt cheek glowed crimson as he fixed his eyes, half in anger, half in astonishment, on Lady Maud.

"So cruel and unaccountable, that I think it is time for a mother to interpose, however painful the duty, and however uncertain the result."

"I cannot conceive what your ladyship means," replied Nugent, haughtily. "If any one has a right to complain, it is I, and not your daughter."

"How stands the case?" exclaimed Lady Maud. "Gertrude, who, from sunrise to sunset, sees less of her husband than the very cattle on his estate, proffers, in the affectionate warmth of her young heart, one little request, one small insignificant petition—that you would be her companion by way of novelty for one day—for one short day. You refuse sternly and deliberately——"

"You know the reason, Lady Maud," answered Nugent, less and less able to control his indignation. "If you do not know it, step to the window; look at the distant fields covered with sand, pebbles, and seaweed. If you do not know the reason, you can see

it," and he rose and pointed to the distant inundation.

"I am aware of all that has occurred," replied Lady Maud, with provoking tranquillity; "and I regret it deeply. Your misfortunes are my daughter's. Some of our own lands have also suffered. What I was saying was, that you sternly refused to accompany her at her urgent request."

"But I did accompany her!" cried Nugent—"I did accompany her!"

"And why?" rejoined Lady Maud, with the very faintest gleam of triumph in her eye—"Why did you at length accompany her, after having refused repeatedly to do so?"

Nugent sat down again, rather disconcerted.

"Was it," continued Lady Maud, "from kindness to my daughter? or was it from a more selfish motive? You went with her indeed, but was it not to gratify a morbid feeling of unreasonable——"

She paused, and Nugent impatiently exclaimed—"Pray, finish your sentence, Lady Maud."

"Well, then, *jealousy*—unreasonable *jealousy*!"

Nugent started to his feet in anger, exclaiming—

"This is too bad! It is shameful! I will not endure it! It is false! Gertrude has not spoken the truth;

and, what is more, she has no right to speak to you at all. It can but make mischief between us."

Lady Maud, who, under the mask of dignity, had been all along carefully watching Nugent's countenance, here thought it prudent to relax a little from her severity, and, applying her handkerchief for an instant to her blue eyes, said, with some appearance of emotion—

"My darling came to me in search of counsel and guidance."

"She was wrong—foolishly and sinfully wrong!" exclaimed Nugent with flashing eyes. "*I* am the person to whom she should apply. *I* am the person in whom she should confide. *I*, and no one else."

Lady Maud, who now thought the conversation was getting too excited, here rose, and, placing her small hand gently on Nugent's arm, said in soft accents—

"And is not that what I wish from my inmost heart? Is it not to knit your hearts together that I have quietly striven for these many months? Do I not tell her that I am sure *you* love *her*, as I now tell you that I am confident *she* loves *you*?"

"Your ladyship," remarked Nugent more calmly, "had far better leave us alone. We ought to be all in all to one another."

"Be so," said Lady Maud. "Be so, by all means.

But are you so now ? Consider the pain you must have inflicted upon her yesterday—consider her sufferings all last night, anticipating the reproaches in store for her when you should meet this morning.”

“ I meant to forgive her,” answered Nugent. “ But I have nothing to ask forgiveness for.”

At this moment Gertrude, who had just awaked, hearing voices below, came down-stairs and entered the drawing-room.

“ My sweet child !” exclaimed her mother, “ how ill and jaded and worn-out you look ! I fear you have suffered much. Come, look at her, Mr. Nugent ; see what she must have gone through. There, darling, give your husband your hand. Mr. Nugent, I am sure her heart is loving and true. Be patient and loving to her. Forgive him, Gertrude ; and do you, Nugent, forgive her, and forget, both of you, all that has passed !”

And Lady Maud, joining their hands together, watched to see whether either hand was withdrawn, and then, placing her handkerchief to her eyes, she glided out of the room.

Notwithstanding, however, the apparent reconciliation effected, Lady Maud, as she stepped into her carriage and drove back towards Beaumont-house, wore

an expression of countenance not altogether indicative of satisfaction. Like many persons who have a taste, or rather a passion for setting matters to rights, and managing by strength of will or by dexterity those who are brought in connection with them, Lady Maud had gone a little further than she meant to go. But the slight want of tact of which she had been guilty, was in reality rather to her credit. It arose from affection for her daughter, which as we have intimated, notwithstanding much that may lead the reader to doubt its existence, was genuine and sincere in its way.

It was this love for her daughter, then, which had somewhat disturbed her usually acute judgment. For it is worthy of note, that those who usually act more from selfish calculation than from real feeling, are apt to make great mistakes when for once their better feelings are engaged in the business in hand. It is a new element to which they are not accustomed, and is apt to throw them off their balance.

Nugent, as soon as Lady Maud was fairly out of the house, pressed his lips affectionately to Gertrude's forehead, and then said in a voice almost harsh from its sadness—

“Gertrude, the happiness of our wedded life is ebbing away. You are beginning to place confidence in others.

You have gone to your mother to unburden your mind. That is wrong. That is weak. Your thoughtlessness yesterday, I can readily forgive and forget. Your want of confidence in me I may indeed, and do *forgive*, but it will be long before I can *forget* it. And now let us summon the household to prayers."

Gertrude, abashed by the severity of his manner, listened in silence. She had intended to ask his forgiveness; but the new turn affairs had taken checked and startled her. They went to prayers, and did not renew a subject painful to both of them, which, perhaps, it was now too late to discuss with any hope of a satisfactory settlement. There was not, however, any apparent soreness on either side. If any thing, each displayed a more scrupulous courtesy and attention to the other's wishes, and a more watchful anxiety to avoid giving offence in daily intercourse. Nevertheless, it was noticeable that Gertrude, although scarce twenty-one, had lost something of the spring and freshness of youth, and was fonder than she used to be of solitary walks, and solitary readings in her boudoir or under the shade of the old Scotch fir.

As for Nugent, too, not content with his farming engagements, he began to seek additional employments. He expressed a wish to the lord-lieutenant to be placed

in the commission of the peace, and as soon as it was complied with, began to attend regularly as a magistrate at Rentworth petty sessions, and as an *ex-officio* guardian at Flintwood union workhouse. Moreover, he became a visitor at the Clawthorp lunatic asylum. The discharge of these duties absorbed more and more of his time, and brought him in contact with certain characters in this narrative, in a way which will be presently related in full.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAWTHORP LUNATIC ASYLUM AT MIDNIGHT.

GEORGE WESTON'S conduct on perceiving that the horseman whose assistance he invoked was Sir Reginald Clinton, may have somewhat perplexed the reader. But, as has been intimated in the early part of the last chapter, Sir Reginald was precisely the person with whom Weston did not wish to come in contact. Therefore, no sooner had he caught a full view of his face, than without a moment's hesitation and before the other had had time to recognise him, he started, as has been described, at full speed across the field without even looking back to see whether Clinton made any effort to rescue the drowning man. Nor did he materially slacken his speed until he was a good distance from the river, when he crossed the hill and made the best of his way back to Rentworth along a footpath over the moor, which was both shorter and more private than the main road. He did not return,

however, to the mines in which, on Sir Reginald's first appearance in the neighbourhood, he had taken refuge ; but sought out a low lodging-house in one of the back streets of Rentworth, where he remained for some days concealed. His object in seeking Harrill had been to ascertain how far he might be trusted, should he himself quit England, and whether he would raise any obstacle to his taking with him the lad Edward, now, as he had been for some time aware, safely ensconced in Flintwood workhouse.

He had found Harrill strongly averse to any such arrangement. The man had no notion of allowing Weston to escape from his clutches. He coolly told him, that if he didn't leave the "brat" where he was, and if he ventured to quit the neighbourhood without his special permission, he would go to Squire Nugent, and tell him all he knew of George Weston's goings-on. "And then what becomes of darling Miss Lucy? Eh, my boy?" asked Harrill, with a look of vulgar triumph.

Just about the same time the outlet works on the river Oke were approaching completion, and Harrill made up his mind to have what he called a "jolly good revenge" on Nugent, for all the injuries he considered he had inflicted on him. Now, Harrill did not reveal what he had in view until Weston and himself

were actually at the outlet ; and Weston, half taken by surprise, and half intimidated, had neither energy nor presence of mind to prevent his desperate companion from executing his purpose. How Harrill came to his end, destroyed by those very waters which his own hand set free, the reader has seen, and we may now turn our attention again to Weston.

In the lodging-house Weston remained concealed for a week or so, never stirring out till nightfall, and then avoiding all but bye-lanes or unfrequented fields. In the mean time, he heard that Harrill's body had been found, and that a coroner's inquest having been held, the verdict was, "found drowned."

It may as well be stated, however, that there was a disposition amongst many of the jury to bring in a verdict of *felo de se*, their firm conviction being, that he was drowned in the act of maliciously doing damage to the new works at the outlet, which, being an act of flat felony, entitled the drowned man in their opinion to the above-mentioned verdict of *felo de se*. This proposition was met by the coroner with much legal acumen and research ; but not finding that he made the smallest impression on any one of the jury, he desisted from haranguing them, and proposed an adjournment to the parlour of the public-house for the purpose of refreshment.

Here, in two minutes and a quarter from the time the first pint of Burton had been served out to each jurymen, the coroner succeeded in making the thing, as the foreman observed in a figure of speech suggested perhaps by the convivial employment they were engaged in, "as plain as a pint pot." So the verdict was "found drowned." And "sarved him right," was added in a sufficiently audible whisper by many of the jury; but this, being slightly irregular, was not entered in the coroner's depositions, nor published in the papers.

So soon as the inquest was over, and no rumour existing, as far as he could learn, of any suspicion attaching to himself, Weston ventured out a little less cautiously, but still only after dusk. On one occasion, after writing a letter, he put it in his pocket and started for a town some ten miles distant to post it. Then walked back to his lodging, arriving at early dawn.

It was in the evening of the next day that Lucy, Gertrude's maid, whilst arranging her mistress's hair just before dinner, proffered a request that she might be allowed to go into the village that evening to do a "little shopping." This request having been immediately granted, Lucy, as soon as dinner was in, put on her bonnet and shawl, and emphatically declining Mrs.

Finchley's proposal, that as there had been strange men about and drownings and what not, it might be safer to take the housemaid with her, hastened towards the village. She was, as we have said, a rather interesting-looking girl, very pale, but with soft blue eyes and regular features, and consequently had her admirers, especially at the general shop where the solitary young man who attended to the wants of the customers, cherished a fond but despairing affection for her. Although, therefore, Lucy's shopping consisted simply in the purchase of two-pennyworth of narrow silk ribbon, she had some difficulty in leaving the shop as soon as she might have expected. Not that young Mr. Crowder had the audacity to intimate in the remotest degree the passion under which he laboured. But he was apt on one plea or another to detain Miss Weston by exhibiting new bonnets, silks, and calicoes with an eagerness which at least secured a passing attention; and invariably wound up his exertions by presenting a jar of raisins or a drum of figs, with an earnest suggestion that a handful or two "might not be disagreeable to 'Miss' on such a hot or such a cold evening," as the case might be. At the same time blushing from the tips of his fingers to the whites of his eyes. On this occasion, however, Lucy rejected both raisins and figs; and, whilst

Mr. Crowder was diving under the counter in search of an ornamental packet of French prunes, took the opportunity of darting out of the shop, and hastening along the village street, did not check her speed until she reached a little stile leading into an extensive plantation of fir and larch which skirted the road for a mile or so. She lightly stepped over the stile, and following a certain track through the wood, indicated by small notches cut occasionally upon the stems of the trees on either side of her, was pursuing her way pretty swiftly, when an arm was lightly placed round her waist, and, turning round, she beheld a man wrapped in a rough ragged overcoat. She sprang from him with a slight scream, but he exclaimed—

“What, Lucy, don’t you know me?”

“Brother, how you frightened me! What are you dressed like that for? You look quite a beggar!”

“Well, I’ve a reason, Lucy. Remember what I’ve often told you. Put confidence in me; don’t ask questions; don’t talk about me; don’t mention my name to any one without my leave. I thought you were never coming, and started to meet you. Here, let us sit down under this tree amongst the dry fern. Now, look here, Lucy. Give me the paper I sent you to sign the other day.”

She drew it forth from her pocket, and gave it to him. Quietly tearing it in pieces, he continued talking, "There's no need to sell any railway stock now, and I'm glad of it. Money in one's pocket is often money lost. As long as I can, I'll keep the cash locked up where it is, Lucy. You're not strong, and who can tell but what you may need it?"

"I'm going on pretty well," said Lucy. "Mistress is as kind a lady as ever, though she's not so happy as she ought to be."

"How's that, then?"

"Oh! she and master, you see, don't altogether suit, that's my humble opinion. You see he's strict and grave, and she's light-hearted and merry-like. Then they fall out, and write no end of letters to each other. My legs ache, I can tell you, with going up and down those old stairs. And then Mrs. Nugent has red eyes very often, and master's away for a week at a time. However, they're very fond of each other—that's sure!"

"How so?" asked Weston.

"Oh! they wouldn't make such a fuss over their quarrels if they weren't. They'd take it more easy."

"My poor dear," said Weston, "I wish for your sake it was a happier home."

"Oh! I do very well. But we had terrible work the

night of the flood, when Harrill was drowned. You heard of that, I suppose?" said Lucy.

"Yes, every body was talking of it."

"Well, Mr. Nugent was out all night with the men, and mistress did not have a wink of sleep, but sat up till daylight crying, and saying it was all her fault. Then, who should drive up to the door soon after breakfast but Lady Maud, who came in and talked I don't know how long with Mr. Nugent; and there was a terrible quarrel I am sure, for Mrs. Nugent sighs so whilst I am doing her hair."

Weston, who had been rather impatient during this domestic recital, now struck in—

"And tell me, Lucy, who was on the inquest? Harrill's inquest I mean."

She ran over the names. Next Weston asked which constable summoned the jury. To this Lucy replied, with something very like a blush, that it was young Mr. Crowder who kept the general shop. He had volunteered to be one of the parish constables that year, she said, as he found it was less interrupting to his business than "overseering or suchlike."

"Well now, dear Lucy, have you heard if any thing was found in Harrill's pockets?"

"To be sure," she said. "Mr. Crowder had shown

her all the things. There was nothing worth naming but a little brown paper parcel, which seemed to have been tied up for you couldn't say how long."

Weston became suddenly interested.

"What was in it?" he exclaimed, anxiously

"Oh! a lot of curious-looking beads on a string; wasn't it funny?"

Weston stood up, and, raising his sister gently from the ground, kissed her and said—

"Now, dear Lucy, you must try and get that string of beads for me."

"I? It is impossible! Mr. Crowder has charge of it. He would never give it up."

"Borrow it then, dear, and lend it to me."

Weston was very much in earnest, and his sister, always accustomed to yield to him, answered after a moment's thought—

"Well, I'll do my best, brother. Trust me for that."

"And here, Lucy, do you see this parcel? Take the greatest care of it till I see you again. Put the string of beads with it, and tie all up together in one parcel. And mind, Lucy," added Weston with emphasis, "mind you hide it in a safe place till I see you again."

"And when will that be? Soon, I hope," said Lucy,

pressing her brother's hand fondly between her own as he held out the parcel to her. "Soon, I hope, dear brother?"

"I trust in a few days, darling, to be with you again."

"And you will tell me where you're going?"

"Lucy, how often must I entreat you to put full trust in me? If you do not, mischief may come of it. Believe that I am doing all for the best. Believe that the one thing I look forward to with joy is the thought of getting my affairs settled, and taking you out of service, and going to live with you in some quiet, happy place."

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Lucy. "What pleasure, to be sure! And have no more separations, and mysteries, and anxieties, and I don't know what——"

"Do you as I bid, then, Lucy. Obey me implicitly, and, above all, be silent as the grave about me and my whereabouts. Do you understand me, Lucy?"

"I do—brother, I do! You may be sure I'll try all I can to serve you."

They kissed each other and parted, after making an appointment to meet at the same spot that day week. Nevertheless, Lucy's blue eyes were moistened with tears as her brother plunged into the plantation, and commenced forcing his way through the rustling branches

of the pine and larch which obstructed his path. For his last words had been—

“And mind, Lucy, if I cannot keep my appointment, be patient and don’t fret. For I may not, after all, be able to meet you.”

It was not particularly difficult to procure the loan of the string of beads from the faithful Crowder. It was his belief it would never be asked for again; the man was dead and buried; the property “of no manner of value to any body, as he could see.” So he thrust it into Lucy’s hands, simply stipulating that if wanted it should be forthcoming; and, on the strength of the obligation, insisted on filling her pockets with a neat assortment of figs, dates, raisins, sugar-candy, and brown Windsor soap. Lucy, as soon as she could, retired with her various spoils to the Manor Farm, where, hurrying to her bed-room, she carefully wrapped up the string of beads, together with the parcel given her by her brother, and placed it at the bottom of her box.

We must now return to Weston, who, after parting with his sister, did not take the road to Rentworth, but struck up a footpath leading over the hills on the side of the valley opposite to the Manor Farm. For a long time his course lay along an undulating down, many hundred feet above the level of the valley, over which

sheep were wandering and feeding at their pleasure. At length, however, he reached a fence skirting one side of the down which he followed some few hundred yards, till finding a gap, partly filled with dead thorn, he got through it, and stepped out upon a long narrow road, little better than a lane, where two carriages could with difficulty pass each other. Pursuing this lane for a mile or so, he came to a lonely roadside inn scarcely raised above the respectability of a beer-shop, standing at a point where four roads joined. There was a light in the tap and sounds of inebriated jollity, and Weston, looking in, perceived three or four farmers of an inferior class, and a labourer or two, busy over their beer and tobacco. He paused at the open doorway, and listened. Confused and noisy as the conversation was, he still could make out the subject of it. The men were loudly discussing the recent accident at the river mouth, the inundation of the marsh land, Harrill's death, Clinton's narrow escape, the coroner's inquest, &c. One of the men seemed to be from Okenham, and Weston, fearful of exciting suspicion if recognised in his present uncouth attire, avoided the tap-room, and, making for the little bar where the liquor was served out, asked for a quart of beer; for he was tired and thirsty after his long walk from Rentworth. The woman of the inn

handed the beer with one hand, whilst she held out the other for the money. He drank eagerly, and then, having procured a light for his pipe, started once more, taking for his course one of the four roads just mentioned.

The road, after some miles were traversed, began to descend into a valley at the bottom of which there was a large plain-looking building surrounded by high walls, and overshadowed by a thick grove of poplars and spruce firs. The night was now far advanced, but the moon was shining clear; and Weston, as he gradually approached the building in question, could distinguish through the occasional breaks in the wood its closed windows glimmering in the moonbeams, and the gleam of a sheet of water stretching in stagnant tranquillity within a stone's throw of the house.

Approaching the heavy wooden gate which guarded the entrance to this sombre mansion, Weston tried to open it; but, finding it fast, laid hold of the foot of a hare which acted as a bell-handle, and gave a gentle pull. The bell rang with a hollow, melancholy sound, and awakened an echo in the hill. At the same time there came upon the night-wind, apparently from some distant part of the building, a wild sort of yell followed by a confused clamour, such as Humboldt might have heard when sleeping by his watch-fire

in the depths of a South American forest. For it resembled the uproar of wild animals in savage contention under cover of the night, rather than the cries or voices of human beings.

The unbarring, however, of a distant door, showed that the sound of the bell had attracted notice; and presently a small panel of the entrance gate opened, and an ill-looking face cautiously emerged through the orifice, exclaiming—

“Who the d—l are you, and what do you want?”

Weston, nothing abashed by this rather energetic greeting, drew from his pocket a dirty card on which a few words were written in pencil, and requested the individual on the other side of the gate to carry that to the doctor. The man took the card and presently returned, followed by a stout red-faced gentleman clad in a plaid dressing-gown and carpet slippers, carrying a lantern in one hand and a meerschaum pipe which he occasionally put to his lips, in the other.

“So”—said the latter gentleman, holding up the lantern in order to distinguish Weston’s features. “So—very good! I have been expecting you this long time. Here, in with you!” he added, throwing open one leaf of the gate.

“And I say, Spottle—do you hear, Spottle?”

The ill-looking man, who seemed something between a waiter out of place and a ticket of leave man, and wore slippers in humble imitation of his master, gave the greasy hair hanging over his forehead a twitch with his finger and thumb, in token of respect, and answered—

“ Here, doctor, here.”

“ Spottle, bar the gate. And hark’ee, Spottle, draw a can of beer and put it in my surgery! I dare to say, Mr. Winthrop, you’re dry after your walk.”

So saying, he led the way across the garden to a small private entrance on one side of the house, leading immediately into what was termed the surgery.

The surgery was a small room communicating with the main body of the building by means of a long passage. The door opening into this passage, as well as the door opening into the garden, was partly of glass, so that the doctor could investigate whoever applied for admittance either from within or from without the building. But, in order to obviate any disagreeable sensation of publicity, a greasy red baize curtain hung before the glazed part of the doors, so as to be drawn only from the inside.

The general appearance of the surgery was that of a small druggist’s shop which had been taken up in the hands of a supernaturally powerful giant, and tho-

roughly shaken for about ten minutes. All was in a jumble. There were shelves round the room; there were drawers, large and small; a cupboard; a high desk to write upon; a table in the middle of the room. So far so well. But the shelves, instead of containing books, for the most part contained boots and shoes. The drawers, which were labelled with a variety of learned names, contained either drugs totally different to those designated on the labels, or else nothing but heterogeneous rubbish, such as empty bottles, old toothbrushes, discarded razors, superannuated pocket-books, ends of candle, rolls of musty medical journals, soiled gloves, broken surgical instruments, empty pomatum pots, a few human bones brown and honey-combed, loose tobacco, a canister of patent preserved meat, a handful of red tape, and a key bugle. Some of the drawers had disappeared, and the empty recesses were filled up with physic-bottles and pill-boxes. Alongside of the boots and shoes that chiefly occupied the bookshelves, might be seen two busts, neither of which presented a very prepossessing appearance. One was the bust of a lady who, in a moment of temporary excitement, poisoned an aged mother. The other was that of a remarkable idiot who had lived and died in an adjacent village. A few pictures hung round the room, happily combining

the interests of surgical science with a taste for field sports. There was an oil painting of the celebrated Sir Grimshaw Tittlebat accidentally leaping his horse into a quarry and breaking his neck. There was a masterly sketch of the well-known terrier, Viper, as he appeared when winning the famous wager his master, Lord —, laid that he would kill fifty rats in ten minutes. The animal is in the act of depositing the fiftieth victim at the feet of his noble owner with an expression of proud self-complacency in his brown eye. Other sporting pictures there were, and also, as we have intimated, surgical works of art. Such as a water-coloured sketch of the face of a lad before and after a successful operation for hare-lip, and several spirited illustrations of small-pox vesicles seen through a magnifying glass, handsomely framed and glazed. Over the chimneypiece, and just under the picture descriptive of Sir Grimshaw Tittlebat's melancholy fate, was a double-barrelled gun which seemed in tolerable working order, and on the chimneypiece itself a long procession of physic-bottles, flanked by a canister of gunpowder on one side and on the other by a bottle of Cognac brandy. The cupboard, the door of which was partly open, appeared to contain wearing apparel. Upon the table in the middle of the room were scattered books and papers,

letters answered and unanswered, a tumbler of brandy and water, a tray spread with bread and cheese, cucumber and onions. The writing-desk, which was deep, contained inside a jug and basin, and was in point of fact a washing-stand.

The doctor having ushered Winthrop, for such we shall for the future term him, into this apartment, and carefully shut and bolted the door into the garden and closed the shutter, pushed a seat towards him; whilst he himself sat down in an easy-chair, formerly used as a dentist's operating chair.

Dr. Crayfoot was a man of lively temperament, and, though his business with Winthrop was of some importance, he beguiled the few minutes occupied by the servant in fetching the beer, by comments on whatever came uppermost in his mind.

"Nothing like a dentist's chair for comfort, Mr. Winthrop; one's head goes back at a delicious angle. Then there's a sentiment about it! Think of the agonies suffered in this chair, Mr. Winthrop!"—here Dr. Crayfoot, leaning his head well back, slowly inhaled his tobacco-smoke and puffed it forth again with equal deliberation. "Many a lovely woman, sir, has writhed with agony in this chair, sir—ay, writhed. Why, it's quite a romance, Mr. Winthrop—quite a romance! But to keep it fresh

you know, to prevent the sentiment evaporating, I use it now and then for operations myself. Very good practice, Mr. Winthrop, is a lunatic asylum—yes, sir, very good practice! Besides, it has a twofold advantage. It keeps one's hand in, and at the same time depresses an excited patient."

Here the doctor was interrupted by the entrance of Spottle with a can of beer.

"Put down the beer, Spottle, and be off!" was the doctor's concise remark as soon as Spottle entered the room.

"Beg your pardon, doctor," returned that individual; "but Mrs. Sharker says Miss Rington is uncommon uppish to-night, and she'd be the better for a powder."

"D—I take the woman! what's the matter with her?"

"Wrote a parcel of stuff on a pewter plate," answered Spottle, lowering his voice to a whisper, "and tried to drop it out of window. Mrs. Sharker, she got sight of it, and went to take it away, when Miss Rington was uncommon uppish and spit at her."

"Oh! she did—did she? Very good—ve-ry good!" replied the doctor, as he rose from the luxurious recesses of the dentist's chair, and, going to a drawer marked "Sedative Powders," pulled it open, but found it empty,

"Powders all used, eh? I must make up a dose, then." Whereupon the doctor took out from behind some other bottles a jar, marked "Tartarized Antimony," and, pouring some of the contents into an old envelope, handed it to Spottle, saying—

"Here, give this to Mrs. Sharker. Enough for three doses. Give one dose now, and another to-morrow morning. Keep the third till wanted. There! Now, then, go!" So saying, he gently pushed Spottle into the passage, and carefully shut and locked the door.

"That's a real blessing to the profession," observed the doctor, sinking into his chair. "Takes the nonsense out of them finely. She'll be as meek as a mouse in half an hour. Here, take your beer, and throw a drop of brandy in to take the chill off. That's a fine fellow! Have any thing to eat?—No! Well, then, here's a cigar. No cigar? Well, then, now to business."

Dr. Crayfoot put aside his pipe, and motioning Winthrop to draw his chair nearer, added—

"I'll not deny, Mr. Winthrop, that I've felt considerably sore about this matter—I'll not deny it." And for a moment any thing but an amiable expression crossed his flushed and somewhat bloated countenance. "But I'm of a forgiving temper, Mr. Winthrop. I never bear malice. It was the same with my father. He never

bore malice. My poor mother died just at the moment he first opened this asylum. It was inconvenient. My father was obliged to hire a matron. But he forgave my mother—forgave her on her death-bed, and she died much comforted—yes, sir, it's a fact!"

Winthrop, having taken another draught of beer, took some papers from his pocket, and in a nervous voice replied—

"Doctor, you're very good. I know I don't deserve much at your hands. But, if you knew all the circumstances, you could make allowances."

"Oh, I do!" rejoined the doctor—"I do! You played me rather a dirty trick. Very well! Now you are going to make amends. Very well! Do so, and I shall forgive the past." And Dr. Crayfoot winked encouragingly to Winthrop, and took a good sup of the brandy and water by his side.

"I hope to do so," said Winthrop—"I hope to do so. But there are difficulties. You see we must be guaranteed against injury."

"Certainly."

"And we must have some remuneration for the trouble and anxiety we shall incur."

"Indubitably! That's the whole point of the joke."

"Now, this," said Winthrop, "is the advertisement in

the *Times* to which I refer. It is repeated on the first of each month."

And he read as follows from the second column of the *Times*—

"To G. W—p. You are earnestly requested to communicate with R. C. without delay, personally or by letter. Have no fear of legal proceedings. Be bold, trustful, and honest. Any reasonable reward shall be yours. If a meeting is feared, at least write me word of those I am in quest of. You know whom I mean. It will be for your advantage. Address to my house in town. Do not delay. This advertisement will be repeated on the first of each month.—R. C."

"So," said Dr. Crayfoot, looking cunningly at Winthrop—"so, that will do. The baronet is warm. His blood's up. Now, the question is, how can we get the most out of him? That's the pith and marrow of the whole affair."

"My own notion," said Winthrop, "is to be moderate. I should rejoice to wash my hands of the whole matter, and make my conscience a little easier than it now is."

"Bother your conscience!" rejoined the doctor, puckering his fat face into an expression of intense contempt. "If you'd a pennyweight of conscience left, you'd be all alive to make compensation for the anxiety and losses you have caused me. Don't talk of conscience, my good man. Bosh! Fudge! Gammon!"

"Well, but what do you recommend?"

Dr. Crayfoot reflected a minute, and then, putting his hands in his pockets, leant back in the dentist's arm-chair, and went on as follows:—

"Put an answer in the *Times*, very cautiously worded. Just a little bait for the baronet to nibble at. Not too much, but enough to whet his appetite, and quicken his pulse. Then wait. Let him mumble and chew it till he's all of a blaze with anxiety."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, throw out another feeler in the *Times*. Of course he will answer it. Make him name the sum he will give by way of reward."

"How much do you think would do?"

"Wait, and see what he offers. For my part, I don't take less than a cool thousand."

Winthrop opened his eyes in some amazement, but said nothing.

"You say," continued the doctor, "that you have the boy in your eye? Whereabouts is he, then?"

Now, though this was spoken in the most careless manner possible, it did not appear that Winthrop regarded the question as unimportant; for, before replying, he raised his light grey eyes quickly to the doctor's face, and, after a little hesitation, answered:—

"To be frank, doctor, I had rather not tell you just now. I think it's as well to keep that point in the background."

"In short, you don't trust me; you think I'm going to steal a march upon you. Well, very good! But you know I've a *little* hold upon you. You remember the signature to the certificates—eh, Mr. Winthrop?"

Winthrop's pale face flushed, but he answered with tolerable composure—

"I know we can do each other harm, and I know we can do each other good. But I don't see why I should show all my cards at once."

"Well, well," said the doctor, finishing his brandy and water. "Take your own course; but mind, fair play. Share and share alike. Honour bright, eh?"

"Why have I come here and put myself in your power if I did not mean to act fairly?" rejoined the other. "You can transport me; that's possible. But I can expose you; that's certain."

"Well, that will do. Shut up that sort of jaw, pray. Take a drop more brandy. What, none? Never saw such a cautious chap. There, let's return to business. We must concoct this advertisement for the *Times*."

And, so saying, the doctor trimmed the lamp, and, producing writing materials, sat down to the table with

Winthrop at his elbow, and set to work. What with writing out fair copies, and then making alterations and tearing them up; and what with stopping to discuss the past and speculate on the future, it was a full hour before they had finished their task.

"And now, what am I to do with you?" inquired Dr. Crayfoot, fixing his eyes upon Winthrop, who was scarcely able to keep his eyes open from fatigue.

"If you could give me a shake-down somewhere, I should be thankful. A little straw in the barn—any thing would do for me."

"No, no! I'm not so bad as that. My father was hospitable, and so am I. It runs in the family. I'm pretty full, but there's a snug little bed-room on the gentleman's side of the house, which will suit you to a T. Come along!" So saying, Dr. Crayfoot led the way through various passages, and up various staircases leading to the apartment in question.

As he passed a door near the landing of the first staircase, he gave Winthrop a nudge with his elbow, and whispered—

"That was her room. D'ye recollect?"

"Was it there she died?" asked Winthrop in a similar tone.

"Ay—ay!—That's the room," rejoined the other.

"And so she had a room to herself, then. I'm glad of that," remarked Winthrop.

"Bah! Stupid! How could I afford to give her a separate room when the money ceased to come in? She was put in here along with two decent patients. Oh, she did very well! Dropped off as quiet as a lamb. She did very well!"

And Dr. Crayfoot, shielding his candle from the gusts of air which ever and anon rushed along the rambling passages of the old house, pursued his way with greater speed.

Occasionally, as they passed some of the sleeping apartments, muffled shouts and incoherent yells would reach their ears, accompanied sometimes by a curse or angry remonstrance from the person in charge of the patients.

In the long passage where the gentlemen slept containing about a dozen rooms, many of them however unfurnished, things at first seemed pretty quiet. But on a sudden, as they drew near the end of the passage, a hideous shriek burst upon the ear followed by groans as of a person suffering intense pain. Winthrop started, and changed colour.

"Pooh!" exclaimed the doctor—"Why, you're quite chicken-hearted. It's only Johnson. It's his habit,

that's all. Here, have a look at him ; 'twill make your mind easier."

And, flinging open one of the doors, he ushered Winthrop into a room of moderate size, without carpet or furniture, except a dilapidated bedstead in one corner of the room on which were some bedclothes of by no means inviting appearance. The atmosphere of the room was rather offensive and Winthrop retired precipitately, but had time to notice a wretched creature strapped in a peculiar fashion to three chairs, and propped up by means of bolsters and bedding. The poor man lay crushed in a heap, keeping his watery eyes fixed on one corner of the room, and occasionally making abortive efforts to move hand or foot. Every now and then he uttered the yells and cries which had so startled Winthrop in passing. In the corner of the room a tallow candle flickered in its socket, placed for safety's sake in an empty basin. There was no one in the room, and Dr. Crayfoot seemed somewhat discontented on remarking it. Kicking with his heel on the floor, he turned to Winthrop and remarked—

"These scoundrelly attendants are more difficult to keep in order than the patients. Halloo ! why aren't you abed, and how is it no one's here to look after Johnson ? I say, Spottle, this won't do, you know. It won't, really."

Spottle, whose eyes were dreamy from the effect of spirits and water, and his voice thicker than usual, excused himself on the ground that he was helping one of his mates to put a strait-waistcoat on a refractory patient in the middle-class ward, adding, by way of further explanation—

“You see, doctor, if the old gemman *should* topple over, we’re close under, and should hear the row and be up in a trice!”

“There’s reason there, Spottle,—sure enough; but look alive now, and pop him into bed.”

“Shall I wash him, doctor?”

“No, it’s too late to-night. Shake his pillows out, give him his sleeping-draught, throw a little vinegar about the room. Look-alive, and get to bed.”

So saying, the doctor led Winthrop nothing loath from the scene, and showed him into an apartment at the end of the passage, where there was a shower-bath on one side of the room and a truckle-bed on the other. Winthrop was too fatigued to be critical as to the extent of the accommodation provided for him. He partly undressed, and threw himself on the truckle bed, where notwithstanding an occasional yell from the chamber of the maniac Johnson he slept soundly till daylight.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLAWTHORP LUNATIC ASYLUM UNDER INSPECTION.

It was about five o'clock when Winthrop was suddenly roused from sleep by sounds of fighting and quarrelling that gradually approached the part of the passage where his room was situate. The next instant his room door was violently flung open, and two ill-looking men, one of whom Winthrop recognized as Spottle, entered dragging in a man in a state of almost complete nudity, who was kicking, striking, biting, butting with his head, in a state of frantic mania. So occupied were the two attendants in their task of restraining the madman, and protecting themselves from his violence, that they did not notice Winthrop's presence.

"Well planted, Spottle!" exclaimed one of the keepers, as the individual of that name dexterously succeeded in hitting the maniac a heavy blow between the eyes, as he was gathering himself up for a desperate effort to leap out of the men's clutches.

"That's a teaser, or my name's not Tomkins! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Follow it up, you fool—follow it up!" rejoined the more business-like Spottle, and the next moment the maniac, half-stunned notwithstanding his violent excitement by the force of the blow, was rudely thrust into the shower-bath; the door shut and bolted, and the string vigorously pulled by the energetic Spottle. Whereupon a sheet of water descended upon the maniac's head in a continuous torrent which seemingly had no intention of leaving off.

The patient at first uttered the most hideous yells and imprecations; but as the water, supplied from a large cistern at the top of the house, continued to pour upon him, his voice grew weaker and weaker, until at length nothing was heard but a succession of sobbing gasping inarticulate sounds.

"Draw it milder now, Spottle," suggested Tomkins

Spottle's rejoinder was a blasphemous imprecation on the head of the individual in the shower-bath, and on all madmen in general.

At this juncture Winthrop ventured to throw out a remark to the effect that he thought the shower-bath had been at work long enough. The men gave a great start to see him; but after a moment's perplexity Spottle re-

cognized his face, and answered with some solemnity—whilst by pulling the string harder he made the water descend with increased violence—

“Young man, keep yourself to yourself. This here’s a medical *h*operation. When we wants your advice we’ll ask for it.”

“Shove him in, too!” suggested Tomkins. “What does the fellow want here?”

“Never you mind, Tomkins—you mind *your* business. I’ve cautioned the young man, and maybe he’ll lay it to heart.”

Notwithstanding these dignified observations, Mr. Spottle shortly let go the string, and the stream of water ceased to fall. The two men then opened a small trap-door on one side of the shower-bath, through which they took a quiet survey of the wretched being crouched up to his middle in water inside.

“Looks bluish about the muzzle—don’t he, Spot?” remarked Tomkins.

“He’ll do now,” rejoined the other with an air of importance. So saying they opened the door, and dragged out the now crushed and enfeebled maniac, who, drenched from head to foot and blue with cold, gabbled nonsense in a whining half-audible voice, and wrung his hands feebly in the air.

"Now, let's give him a rub down, and then chuck him into the padded room till the doctor's up." With that the men, seizing the maniac one on each side, half-dragged half supported him out of the room and along the passage.

Winthrop somehow or other did not sleep after this hydropathic exhibition, but lay tossing on his narrow pallet until the increasing noise in different parts of the house told him that the servants were generally astir. Whereupon he rose, and hastily dressed himself in a suit of clothes lent him by the doctor, more decent than those he had taken off. He was on the point of leaving the room when the door opened, and Dr. Crayfoot entered, exclaiming—"Well, Mr. Winthrop, and how have you enjoyed your first night in Clawthorp Lunatic Asylum? Luxuriously, I believe. Comfortably, I'm sure."

"Pretty well, I thank you, doctor. It's rather strange here at first."

"Right, sir—right!" returned the doctor. "Queerish to a stranger, I've no doubt. But come along to breakfast. Mrs. Sharker's a trump for turning out a good dish of coffee and a devilled kidney."

Winthrop was directed down-stairs by the doctor, and shown into a small parlour not far from the surgery, in

which breakfast was laid out for him. Crayfoot then left him, intending as he said to take his gun and try and knock over a partridge or two.

On this morning, however, the recreation was denied him; for, as he was issuing out of the back-door with gun on shoulder, he was stopped by one of the maids, who slipped a note into his hand just left she said by a lad from Rentworth. The doctor opened it, and read as follows:

“SWAMPSHIRE ARMS, RENTWORTH.

“DEAR CRAY,—

One o'clock sharp!

Yours always,

J. J.”

This communication may not strike the reader as particularly explicit or important. Nevertheless it seemed to have an immense effect on Dr. Crayfoot. He dropped his gun in a corner of the passage, plucked out his watch, looked at it hastily, and then commenced bustling to and fro, giving a variety of orders to different members of the household in succession. His first injunctions were to Mrs. Sharker.

“Sharker, set the maids to washing. Sharp's the word! The visitors are coming punctually at one!

Just had notice from Jenkins of the 'Swampshire Arms' where they hire their carriage and horses. Mops and buckets, Mrs. Sharker! Mops and buckets! And hark'ee, Sharker, mind we've a good lunch. A first-rater, Mrs. Sharker. Here, Spottle, get out half a dozen of the best sherry, and tap the new cask of home-brewed. Be alive, and meet me up in the gentlemen's gallery in ten minutes! There's lots to be done there!"

Away went Mrs. Sharker, away went Spottle to the cellar. The whole house was in commotion. The news of the pending arrival of the visiting justices spread like wildfire. The subordinates vied with each other in endeavouring to make every thing look spruce, clean, comfortable, and even cheerful. The doctor hastened to and fro, superintending the arrangements.

"Here, Tomkins, Blunker, Spottle, carry Mr. Johnson into No. 12. Put him into bed snug. Lock up his old room and give me the key. Throw a carpet in No. 15. Wash Mr. Greenwood's face and hands. How came Miller with that awful black eye? What, wouldn't go into the shower-bath? The obstinate pig! Deuced unlucky he should have that eye just now, though. Put a piece of raw beef on it. Lay him in bed and sit by him. Draw curtains, shut shutters, say his head's bad, and he can't bear the light. Here, Spottle, take this 'Illustrated

London News' into the gentlemen's sitting-room, and the usual show-books. Tell them they shall have a treat to-morrow and see the hounds throw off at Flintwood bridge, if they behave well to-day. Put some lumber in the padded room. Say it's never wanted, every body's so quiet. Clean shirts, well-polished boots for all the gentlemen, and a pinch of snuff for each. Take away that strait-waistcoat, you blockhead ! Throw it into the lumber-room. Bustle about—bustle about !”

Dr. Crayfoot from thence hurried to the lady's side.

“Sharker, Sharker ! change Mrs. Rushton's cap ! It is as brown as a dishclout. What a howling Miss Fry is making ! I'll cram some antimony down her throat if she don't hold her jaw. Ask Mrs. Crayfoot to clear out of the best sitting-room. Put Madame Duprez and Miss Phillibeg there. Give Miss Bircher a handful of halfpence to put in her pocket. 'Tis the only thing to keep her quiet. Where's Miss Rington ? Oh, in the padded room ! Fetch a dose of sedative for her from the surgery room—left hand drawer, three from the top. Small bottle. One teaspoonful in a wine glass of water. Look sharp ! Clear out that old Martha. She's in Miss Phillibeg's room. Wash ! Scrub ! Work away, my lasses ! Work away !”

Winthrop meanwhile had beguiled the time since

breakfast by reading an old sporting magazine alternately with a county newspaper and was getting rather fatigued, when the doctor entered and said—

“I say, the visiting justices are coming. Where will you stow yourself? Shall I pass you off as a new keeper?”

“I’ll take a stroll in the wood yonder.”

“But it’s raining like mad. Step with me, and I’ll stow you in a spare room, where you can have a chair and a table, and your pipe and your pot. The justices never poke into unoccupied rooms. Oh, they’re gentlemanly fellows—very!”

Accordingly Winthrop withdrew to the apartment named, and Dr. Crayfoot proceeded with his preparations.

The visiting justices, four in number, with their clerk and doctor, arrived punctually at one. A clean smiling parlour-maid opened the front door, and ushered them into a comfortably furnished sitting-room. They were so long closeted in this room that Dr. Crayfoot began to grow impatient, and expressed to the sympathizing Spottle his feelings on the subject.

“What can they be at? Eh, Spottle? What do you think?”

“Best inquire, doctor,” answered that individual.

"No, that looks fussy. Fact is, there are two new visitors to-day, and they're swearing them in. But it don't take long to gabble over an oath. They must be overhauling my books and certificates. That's the worst of a greenhorn. Can't take things quietly. Always sniffing about to find something amiss."

At length, however, the bell rang, and the visitors asked for the keys, and started on their round of investigation.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Jones, one of the new magistrates; "but I don't think we require Dr. Crayfoot's attendance. In fact, I don't think it desirable."

The other visitors looked at each other, and conferred in whispers. "I agree," said the other new magistrate; "I agree with Mr. Jones. The patients, when we see them, ought to be under no sort of intimidation; ought to feel quite at their ease."

"Well, Mr. Nugent, it has not been our usual custom, but just as you please."

"I think they are right, Crayfoot's better away," put in Robinson.

"Very well. It's unusual. But as you please," rejoined Brown.

The doctor's face had suddenly become dark and

lowering when this unprecedented proposition was made. But, as soon as he saw the general feeling, he gulped down his displeasure, and with an attempt at a grin of good-humoured amusement handed the keys to the visiting doctor, and retired.

He had not been gone more than ten minutes, when he was informed that the visitors wanted to speak to him.

Muttering a few curses on their heads, he hastened after them and found they were all assembled in the room of Miller, the man with the black eye. The shutters and curtains were thrown open, and the black eye on the madman's face was very conspicuous.

"Dr. Crayfoot," asked the visiting doctor, Pipwood by name, "just tell the visitors how this patient came by his black eye—will you, please?"

"His black eye? Oh! there was a struggle. He fell upon the keepers and half-murdered them. But you had better question the keepers yourself. Here, Spottle! Tomkins! just step this way."

Mr. Jones insisted, however, on questioning the two men separately, to the manifest astonishment of Dr. Crayfoot, whose countenance became livid with indignation and disgust. The consequence was, that Tomkins told one story and Spottle another; whilst Mr. Miller,

whose dangerous paroxysm had now subsided, complicated the matter by delivering a third version. This was instantly scouted by the whole assembled company, on account of his unfortunately insisting that the Czar of Russia was personally present during the whole fracas vigorously aiding and abetting the keepers in their savage proceedings. Yet Miller's narrative was rigorously exact and true, barring the unlucky introduction of the Czar. The black eye, however, and the contradictory statements of the two keepers, were tangible facts, and could not be got rid of. Spottle and Tomkins retired discomfited, and wreaked poetic justice on one another by a fight in the back-yard and the mutual exchange of vigorous compliments in the shape of two black eyes apiece.

The visitors proceeded on their rounds,

Nugent stopped at Mr. Johnson's bed-room, not his present apartment, but the one usually occupied by him, and which the reader will remember had been locked by Dr. Crayfoot.

"Who occupies this room?"

Dr. Crayfoot bustled up.

"Unoccupied room, sir. Never used, sir."

"I beg your pardon, but I think we ought to see all your rooms, doctor, occupied or not. Don't you think

so, gentlemen?" added Nugent, turning to his companions.

"Well! I must say—upon my word, I should say we ought," said Robinson.

"Quite unprecedented! Twenty years have I presided over this establishment, and my father before me, and never have I been asked to show an unoccupied room. Besides, I have not the key about me."

"You will oblige the visitors, then, by fetching it," said Nugent drily.

"Come, Cray," whispered Pipwood, who was a good-natured little man. "Come, Cray, you had best fork out—give them rope, give them rope! Don't thwart them. Get your key at once."

Crayfoot retired to the end of the passage, pretending to fetch the key, and then returning, threw open the door of the mysterious apartment as wide as he could, with an air of deeply injured innocence. There was a smothered groan of disgust and they all rushed out *pêle mèle*.

"What an abominable stench!" burst from one and all. Mr. Jones felt faint, and had to get out into the fresh air.

"I dare say, gentlemen—I dare say!" exclaimed Crayfoot with a superior air. "Smells close. No wonder; the room is unoccupied, and of course smells close."

Meantime Nugent, with an effort, forced himself to enter the room, and presently returned with a newspaper in his hand.

"This room has been occupied since the day before yesterday," he said.

"How so, sir? What do you please to mean, sir? This is really going too far."

"This newspaper is the *County Herald*, published this week. Some one has been reading it in this room."

Dr. Crayfoot was disconcerted for a moment, then replied—

"Possibly a keeper may have been sitting here. I will inquire. Here, Blunker, did you leave this paper here?" (with an energetic wink at Blunker.)

"Believe I did, sir—believe I did. Mislaid it somewhere, and think I was reading it here whilst waiting for my turn to sit up with Johnson."

"Ah! with Johnson, next door there? Eh?"

"Yes, sure, sir."

"This room has never been occupied these three weeks, has it, Blunker?"

"No, sure, sir."

"You may go, Blunker."

So ended this highly satisfactory dialogue. The visi-

tors looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and passed on.

Dr. Crayfoot whispered to one of his myrmidons to hurry up-stairs to Winthrop and tell him he was not safe from interruption where he was; and, if he did not wish to see company, he had better slip out by the back way into one of the out-houses till the place was clear.

In the next room to the one last named lay the patient Johnson, howling and groaning in his usual fashion.

"Does he always howl in this way?" asked Mr. Jones.

"Yes, Mr. Jones—yes!" exclaimed little Dr. Pipwood, who was anxious to put in his oar—"Mania, sir—mania! How are you, Johnson, my poor fellow?"

Johnson butted his head at Pipwood's face with a yell of fury, and that functionary withdrew with precipitation.

"Dangerous fellow!" remarked Crayfoot with a grin.

"What are those straps for?" asked Mr. Jones.

"Why, to prevent him doing mischief, to be sure," answered Crayfoot, rather contemptuously.

"Have you ever tried how he would behave without them?" asked Mr. Jones.

"Often, sir—often; it requires three men to hold him."

"Well," said Nugent after a moment's conference with

Jones and the other visitors, "we should like to take them off and give him a trial."

"As you please. Blunker, call Spottle and Tomkins."

"Stand back, sir—I advise you!" added Crayfoot, addressing Mr. Brown who was growing a little pale.

Nugent advanced to the bedside, and, after looking steadily at the man for a minute or so, said slowly and distinctly—

"My man, I am going to take off your straps, and give you liberty. Will you promise to behave well?"

The man rolled his eyes and stared as if he did not understand, but he ceased to howl or to struggle.

Nugent repeated his words.

The man seemed to get a glimmering notion of Nugent's meaning, and nodded his head affirmatively.

In a moment the straps which confined both his hands tightly to the sides of the bed were unbuckled, and similar straps confining the feet were also removed. The company fell back a respectful distance, whilst Mr. Brown's creaking shoes were heard slowly retiring at the end of the passage. Blunker and Spottle tucked up their sleeves as if for a pugilistic encounter, and eyed their victim as two mastiffs might eye a bull, half in fierce exultation, half in well-grounded awe. The liberated

maniac shook himself, kicked out his legs, stretched his arms, rolled himself up in ball, flung himself out at full length, rubbed his eyes, scratched his head, stared for a minute at the company, drew the bedclothes round him, and—went to sleep.

“Blessed if he’s slept these ten days!” was the comment of Blunker.

“Sulky,” observed Dr. Crayfoot.

“Interesting—very interesting!” remarked Pipwood.

The visitors conferred a minute, and then the senior visitor clearing his throat observed—

“Doctor, we think—my brother magistrates and Dr. Pipwood—we think this poor man ought not to be strapped, but only watched.”

“Watched?” asked Crayfoot—“watched? Why, he’s watched day and night, as it is!”

“Well, then, that makes the change of less importance to you. We think he should be put on his good behaviour, and never placed under any restraint whatever, or only for a short time in a case of urgency.”

Dr. Crayfoot bowed, and, too enraged to speak, retired abruptly.

They visited the gentlemen’s sitting-room.

The patients were lying about in various attitudes. One heavy-looking, pale man sat motionless in his chair,

his head bent forwards till his chin rested on his breast. So still was he that his breathing was scarcely perceptible, and his dull eyes never even seemed to blink. Another, a younger man, sat with his eyeballs starting out of his head, grinning at the visitors. Then, thrusting his thumb into his mouth as far as it would go, commenced sucking it like an infant. Others were lively and intelligent, and addressed the visitors without exhibiting any symptoms of a disordered mind.

One elderly man took the thing philosophically. "Thank you, gentlemen, for your inquiries. I am pretty well; much the same as usual. Any complaints to make, do you say, sir?" he added, turning to Nugent with a slight smile on his careworn face—"What's the good of making complaints? Who believes us? Your coming here is quite a matter of form. I know it but too well. Twenty years' experience of these places have I had, and I ought to know something about them. Do I like this establishment as much as the last? No; on the whole, no! Many things I don't like here. The attendants are rough. But what's the good of complaining? Only make my situation more uncomfortable. Our dinners are served out to us in separate plates through a trapdoor in the dining-room as if we were so many wild beasts. But what then? what's the use of complaining?"

Make myself a marked man. No! Your coming is a form—all a form!”

And, so saying, the old man put his hands in his pockets, and sauntered to the further end of the room.

On the ladies' side of the establishment Mrs. Sharker was very polite and deferential. She seemed good friends with the visiting doctor and with the visitors, for they shook hands with her and had a good five minutes' pleasant banter and badinage.

Mrs. Sharker, we may explain, was a fine-looking woman, though disfigured by large prominent front teeth, which gave her somewhat of the appearance of an ogress.

“This is Mrs. Phillibeg's room, I think,” said Dr. Pipwood. “Let me see, this makes the twenty-first patient; we have twelve more to see. Time's rather short. We must push on. And how are you, Mrs. Phillibeg?”

Mrs. Phillibeg was seated in an arm-chair, with a head-dress composed of the feathers of a cock pheasant. She looked tremendously dignified, and replied—

“You will please to call me by my right name, you old driveller! I am the Duchess of Marlborough.” And she drew herself up in her chair.

"He, he, he! Very good. Well, then, how is your *grace*? He, he, he!"

The words were scarcely out of the doctor's mouth, when a swinging box on the ear descended on his head as he bowed with an air of mock respect, and sent him staggering across the room towards Mademoiselle Duprez, who lying on a sofa received him with a string of execrations in the best Parisian French, and a kick on the shins. The ogress came to the rescue, and Dr. Pipwood retreated from the room considerably discomfited.

"Always getting into mischief with the ladies, doctor," remarked the ogress.

Mr. Brown laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Any body in confinement?" asked the senior visitor.

"Miss Rington has retired to the padded room for a little quiet," answered the ogress blandly. "She was a little put out last night, poor thing!"

"Well, show us the way there."

As soon as they reached the door of the padded room, Mrs. Sharker with a sweet smile, revealing all her upper teeth, observed—

"If I might suggest, I would advise the visitors to look through the trapdoor, and not enter the room.

She is a most ferocious patient ; quite dangerous, I assure you."

Mr. Brown's creaking shoes were again heard retiring from the scene.

"Thank you," said Mr. Jones. "That is the very reason we should wish to see her more closely."

The ogress, again showing her teeth, and producing a key, slowly opened the door.

Dr. Pipwood prudently pushed Mrs. Sharker in first. Miss Rington was lying in a heap in a corner of the dark mildewed closet which went by the name of the padded room. The floor and walls were covered with floor-cloth, behind which was horse-hair and wool to break the force of any blow which patients during a violent paroxysm might give themselves.

"Dear, if the poor thing ain't in a faint !" screamed Mrs. Sharker. "Here, Betsey, Mary Anne, bring water and sal-volatile !"

The visitors now came forward boldly enough, and assisted the ogress to remove the patient into the air, where she soon came to and immediately commenced a faint indistinct jabbering, of which no sense could be made.

"This is too bad !" said the visitors.

"Accidents will happen," said Mrs. Sharker, dropping a curtsy.

"But the padded room is a regular cellar. No proper ventilation; damp and dark," said Nugent.

"We will make a note of it," said Dr. Pipwood.
"Cray must improve it. It's too bad!"

"Then, again, no patient should be left entirely alone, with no one to look after her in such a place," put in the other new visitor.

Here Mrs. Sharker dropped a curtsy, and, showing her teeth, remarked—That the visitors' coming always put things in a confusion, and that Betsey had only left the door of the padded room to help dish up the turkey three minutes before the visitors had come round to the ladies' side. The fact being that the common rule of the visitors was to peep into the padded room but not enter it, which rendered Mrs. Sharker less anxious about appearances than she would otherwise have been.

They now turned their steps towards the parlour, whence they had started on their rounds. At the end of the passage was another room locked up, and stated to be unoccupied. Mr. Brown was getting anxious for luncheon, but it was thought best to have a look at it. Several minutes elapsed before the key could be found; but at length Mrs. Sharker re-appeared with a smile of ghastly dimensions distorting her countenance.

"You see, gentlemen, the room is never used, nor has

any one could
was to open
being done,
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ture of the
with dust.
small bed-
A fat beetle
as if sud-
so large a

aked Nugent,
answered
"Dr. Pip-
et, sir. You
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itor.
An Italian,
Queer case

rather. Put here by her friends, who paid down a sum in advance and then left her to shift as she could ! Never came near her, and, the worst of it was, never continued the payment—the annual payment. Dropped it altogether, and left Cray in the lurch. Oh, poor Cray felt it deeply, I assure you !”

“ Well, but why didn’t he put her in the workhouse, or get her admitted into the county asylum ? ”

“ Don’t know. Had too much feeling, perhaps.”

“ What, old Cray ? Pooh ! ” rejoined the senior visitor, laconically.

“ Well, he didn’t turn her adrift ; that’s all I know. She wasn’t very long on his hands. Died of gastric fever, or something of the kind.”

Nugent listened with that strange interest we sometimes feel in things and persons brought suddenly before us, over which hangs a sort of mysterious vagueness. But there was a cry of “ Luncheon ! Luncheon ! ” from outside, and Mr. Brown’s creaking shoes were heard rapidly passing down the passage.

Nugent cast one look round the deserted and forlorn apartment, and then joined the remainder of the party as they all hastened towards the dining-room.

Luncheon was at first gloomy, but what with home-brewed ale and fiery sherry, some degree of hilarity

was gradually evoked; and by the time the roast turkey had been removed, and apple tart and custard, with cream cheese and a well-dressed salad, placed on the table, most of the company were in tolerable good-humour. The persons who seemed to be least at their ease were Dr. Crayfoot and the new visitors. The former was artificially lively, the latter awkwardly constrained.

On adjourning to the small parlour where they first met, it was found the clerk had already drawn up the rough draft of a report, which he proposed to insert if agreeable to the visitors in the visitors' book. This was the signal for a rather protracted discussion, the result of which was that a more elaborate report than that prepared by the clerk was transcribed into the visitors' book, and signed by each of them. We will take the liberty of placing the amended report before our readers, premising that it was not framed to meet the views of any one visitor in particular, but was rather the result of a compromise between all of them.

“APPROVED REPORT.

“We have made a careful inspection of Clawthorp Lunatic Asylum, and have seen all the patients. The smell in some of the rooms was very offensive. We recommend a free use of soap and water, and chloride

of zinc. We found Mr. Johnson under restraint, being tightly strapped down to his bed. On releasing him he evinced no inclination to be violent, and we advise in his case a milder and more confiding mode of treatment. Mr. Miller's face showed marks of recent ill usage, and, from inquiries instituted, we have come to the conclusion that his attendants Spottle and Tomkins are not to be trusted, and should be at once dismissed. Miss Rington we found shut up in the padded room in a fainting state. The room is badly ventilated, and unfit for use. We should add, in justice to Dr. Crayfoot, that Miss Rington is delicate, and might have fainted any where else. Miss Lacy complains that her relations will not remove her from the asylum—although her removal on probation has been recommended—because they are interested in continuing the administration of her property. We shall cause due inquiry to be instituted into the truth of this allegation. Mrs. Williams states that she was compelled to sleep with a patient of disagreeable habits, as a punishment for making complaints to the commissioners. This may be a misconception on her part, but we name it for the information of the commissioners. The food of the patients appears plentiful and wholesome. The usual amusements are provided. But we think the billiard

table on the gentleman's side would be more serviceable if provided with cues, and that the ladies' piano would be improved if the fifteen strings now wanting were replaced. The cistern on the upper floor leaks, and though it is true this only happens when it contains water, we advise that it should if possible be made watertight. Prayers are read twice a day by Dr. Crayfoot. We would suggest that a visit from a clergyman two or three times a year might be attended with advantage.

Signed,

"S. BROWN,	R. ROBINSON,	O. NUGENT."
T. JONES,	P. PIPWOOD, M.D.,	

The report was signed, the various certificates and papers examined; and at length, later than usual, the visitors took leave of one another, and departed to their several homes. Nugent, after waiting for his horse for some time in vain, determined to go to the stable and fetch it himself. Blunker all this time was getting the animal ready, but very much at his leisure, for Nugent's fault-finding had created general disgust in the establishment. Not finding the stables immediately, Nugent wandered about the premises, rather perplexed by the various ins and outs which met him on every turn. Whilst crossing one of the yards he

became, however, suddenly interested in the movements of a man who was smoking a pipe under a shed at one end of it. Nugent stopped and narrowly scrutinized him, then hastily but quietly approached him. The man, although not looking towards Nugent, seemed immediately conscious that some one was approaching, for he hurried towards a door at the other side of the yard. Nugent, however, quickening his pace soon overtook him, and, placing his hand on the man's shoulder, exclaimed in a low distinct voice—

“George Weston, you are my prisoner!” At these words, Winthrop, for Winthrop it was, seemed to shrink into himself, and staggered against the wall as if ready to fall. “You are my prisoner! I charge you with feloniously destroying the flood-gates of the river Oke, or aiding and abetting in so doing.”

On hearing these words Winthrop began somewhat to revive.

“Where is your warrant?” he inquired sullenly.

“Oh! I shall risk that!” said Nugent; “I have my evidence all ready, and I only wish I had found you before, when my brother magistrates were here. You would have been committed this very day.”

Winthrop was silent. He appeared to be casting about for some mode of extrication.

"I grieve deeply for your poor sister," added Nugent; "you have brought ruin on her head as well as your own. She must, of course, leave us."

At this the other, who had until now preserved an attitude of dogged recklessness, suddenly lost his self-command. Clapping his hands whilst his eyes became dim with tears, he exclaimed passionately—

"Mr. Nugent—squire, I swear I am innocent—innocent as a babe! Never touched a stick, or a twig, or a stone, or a brick belonging to you, so help me heaven! I am innocent as a babe unborn. Oh, do believe me! Mr. Nugent—do believe me! Oh, what can I do to make him believe me?" And the man looked round in a kind of despair, as if to find a friend who would say a word for him. Nugent was struck by his intense earnestness of manner. He knew that the evidence against him was very slight, and was not sure whether it would even procure his committal for trial.

"You were seen going towards the Oke river on the afternoon of the breaking down of the outlet, and you were in Harrill's company."

Winthrop winced for a moment, then replied—

"That proves nothing, or next to nothing. I solemnly declare, I would have sacrificed my right

hand to have saved the outlet. Mr. Nugent—Mr. Nugent, you are a kind man—you are what is called a religious man. Shew your religion in having mercy on my sister and me !”

“ Were you with Harrill, or were you not ?” asked Nugent, who was beginning to relent.

“ I am the victim of circumstances. I will explain it all some day. Believe me, I am innocent ! What object could I have in injuring you or yours ?”

“ Well, will you tell me whether you were with Harrill, and give a full and candid account of all you know of this affair ?”

“ Mr Nugent,” answered the other after a moment’s consideration, “ you are under an obligation to me.”

“ What do you mean, my man ?”

“ When the Rentworth rioters were marching upon Beaumont-house and Okenham, I went out and met them face to face. I spoke to them—reasoned with them—urged them to refrain from violent courses. I was unsuccessful. I was pelted and flung in a ditch. You know this is the truth. I was unsuccessful, but I did my best. I strove, at whatever risk to myself, to save Beaumont as well as the Manor Farm from destruction. Surely, *something* is due to me.”

“ Well,” Nugent went on, “ there may be some truth

in all that. But what do you expect me to do? Allow you to decamp without a word of explanation?"

"All I ask is, that you should believe me. I am innocent. Harrill was no friend of mine, and never was. I am glad the brute is dead!"

"Don't say that," said Nugent. "The wretched man died in his sins."

"Well, I am glad he's gone. I can't help it. Now, all I ask of you is, believe what I say. Let me go in peace, and be kind to Lucy. She is the only thing I care for on the face of the globe."

Nugent reflected a few seconds, then said abruptly—"Go, Weston—go! I make no promises, but at all events I will not detain you now. I will consider; I will reflect. Meantime do not cross my path again. Your sister shall remain with us, at all events until we find her another place. I ask no questions. Go!"

Winthrop muttered a few hurried words expressive of thankfulness, and then plunged into the shrubberies adjacent. Nor did he again show himself until Nugent, having found and mounted his horse, reached the brow of the hill above the asylum, and was galloping homewards along the turf which flanked one side of the road. There was evident agitation in Winthrop's

manner as he entered the house, and sought an interview with Dr. Crayfoot. He found that gentleman seated in the dining-room, at a table spread with the *debris* of the recent repast, and drinking brandy and water for the purpose of soothing his perturbed feelings. At the other end of the same table Mrs. Sharker sat, showing her teeth in an unpleasant manner, and occasionally sipping a glass of sherry.

Winthrop's first words on entering, were—

"Doctor, I am very sorry, but I must leave this place immediately."

"Be off with you, then!" growled Crayfoot. "Be off with you!"

The ogress seemed to think this mode of address a little more vigorous than the occasion called for, and smilingly remarked in a loud aside to Winthrop—

"You see our good doctor has been sadly put out to-day. He's been shamefully treated—shamefully! Take a chair, young man—do, now."

Winthrop declined, but the doctor, making an effort to swallow his ill temper, seconded Mrs. Sharker's proposal, and suggested his taking some refreshment.

"You see I have been awfully 'riled' this morning. Never had such doings in Clawthorp Asylum these twenty years! It's enough to make my poor dear father

turn in his grave. Ay, and mother also!" Here the doctor seemed almost affected, and drank some brandy to enable him to maintain his usual composure.

"Never were such doings. To have my house ransacked and turned inside out! A rebellious spirit let loose amongst the patients! My trustiest and cleverest keepers turned adrift! 'Tis too much for flesh and blood! Pipwood turned against me, too! Robinson also! It's a regular persecution—that's what it is!"

He wound up with a volley of oaths directed against each one of the visitors, but especially against Nugent, and then appeared a little relieved. Mrs. Sharker thereupon ventured to throw out a few consolatory remarks to the effect, that all would settle down comfortable by and bye, that it was only a flash in the pan, &c., &c. But Crayfoot pointed to the report in the visitors' book, the ink of which was scarcely dry, and exclaimed—

"Read that, you smiling goose—read that! Don't tell me. It will put the commissioners on their mettle. There'll be a row! There'll be a row!"

"Oh, you'll weather the storm, never fear! Here, take a drop more brandy—there's a dear old boy!"

Winthrop, who perceived that there was little use of attempting to discuss business under present circumstances, swallowed a hasty meal.

His intention was to lose no time in getting out of reach of Nugent, whose resolution he feared might alter. Not that he had much fear of any charge being established against him in the affair of the outlet. But he dreaded publicity, and thought his only prudent course was to keep out of the way. At the same time he felt it was requisite to keep himself in communication with Crayfoot, as well as with his sister Lucy who might need his guidance and protection. As for Edward Harrill, he was safe in Flintwood workhouse, and was not likely to leave it until old enough to be apprenticed. Nevertheless, Winthrop began to debate in his own mind whether the time was not now come for removing the lad and taking him in charge, having views concerning him which the reader will better understand by and bye.

Revolving these matters in his mind, Winthrop, having finished his meal, rose and took leave of the doctor and Mrs. Sharker, acquainting the latter, for her companion was not, strictly speaking, sober, at what address a letter would find him.

"By the bye," he exclaimed, as he was quitting the room, "how am I to get out of the house?"

"Go to Blunker!" answered the doctor shortly.

"Can you find Blunker's room, young man?" asked Mrs. Sharker.

"It's the last door on the left hand of the passage leading to the offices. I'd show you, only I don't like to leave the doctor."

"Go to Blunker!" again grunted Dr. Crayfoot. Winthrop, who had noticed the room, and remembered the way perfectly well, nodded his head, and left the room. His footsteps were heard a few seconds on the uncarpeted passage outside, and then there was a silence, only broken by the snoring of the doctor who had abruptly dropped asleep. Mrs. Sharker took a pretty good sip of the doctor's brandy and water, and then prepared to lock up the wine and spirits.

She had just begun to unlock the door of the side-board, when she heard a trampling of feet in the room overhead, followed or rather accompanied by a piercing shriek. Now shrieks, as the reader will have learnt, were not wholly unknown in this establishment, but then the apartment above was unoccupied—had been unoccupied for months—was in fact the apartment already described as that in which the foreign lady had breathed her last. Mrs. Sharker was puzzled, but she had no time for reflection. The instant afterwards another shriek broke upon her ear, so loud that it seemed to be almost outside the window of the very room where she was standing. Then a dark object, like the figure of a man,

whirled past the window and descended upon the ground with a heavy dull crash. There were no more shrieks. Only in the room above a long loud hoarse burst of convulsive laughter as if some particularly good joke had that moment been perpetrated. All this passed in the twinkling of an eye. Mrs. Sharker rushed to the window, looked out, uttered an exclamation of horror, and running to the bell rang a loud peal. She then shook the doctor and tried to wake him, but all she could elicit was simply, "Go to Blunker!" So she made for the door, and called for help until half-a-dozen male and female attendants came rushing along the corridor terrified out of their wits, and carrying strait-waistcoats and leather straps in either hand.

Here, however, we must try the reader's patience, and bring the chapter to a close without describing any further the nature of the catastrophe, which has just occurred. This can be more conveniently set forth in a future chapter. For it is high time for a while to leave the lunatic asylum, and pay another visit to the Flintwood workhouse, to see what has become of Edward Harrill.

CHAPTER IX.

EDWARD NO LONGER A PAUPER.

EDWARD had passed more than a year within the walls of Flintwood union workhouse, and in spite of harsh treatment, unwholesome confinement, and insufficiency of solid food, was growing a tall shapely lad enough, though stamped with the pale languid careworn aspect so common amongst pauper youths. Of Harrill he had heard very little, and seen nothing. The sensation of being at all events out of the clutches of this ruffian was a sort of negative comfort, which, when he felt particularly low and wretched, Edward would take pains to call to mind. It was indeed a piece of advice given him by David Price the cobbler, always when he was very down-hearted to look back at the past, and see whether he had not been sometimes still worse off, yet had been in good time delivered out of his trouble, and enabled to look back upon it as a tale that was over and done. And so it would be with him again.

Once, however, Edward had a great fright. He had been going an errand for the surgeon to the adjacent village, and was hastily returning, in the hope of receiving the fourpenny-piece promised him as a reward if he executed his commission promptly, when he was waylaid at the very entrance of the workhouse yard by a man whose face he well knew, and who was always associated in his mind with Harrill. This was George Weston, or Winthrop, as we have now taken to call him ; and no sooner had Edward recognized him than he tried to make a bolt past him, and get inside the workhouse yard once more. Winthrop, however, caught him by the arm, and without violence detained him, alleging he had come to see how he was going on, and would be glad to be of any use to him. The lad had a peculiar dislike to Winthrop, why he could scarcely explain, for the man had been always assiduous to gain his favour, but so it was that none of his civil speeches had the smallest effect on him whatever. In fact, when Winthrop began to sound Edward as to whether he would like to regain his liberty, and go about with him to see the world and enjoy a little life, Edward, whose manners were not improved by the company he had been thrown amongst in the workhouse, bluntly declared that he would see Winthrop in a certain place which shall be nameless

before he would stir with him one inch. Winthrop thereupon, in the vexation of the moment, gave Edward a gentle shake, to which the latter responded by suddenly breaking loose from him, picking up a stone to fling at him, and shouting "Murder!" and "Stop thief!" at the extreme pitch of his voice. Winthrop, who had reasons of his own for wishing to be on good terms with the lad, endeavoured to pacify him, but finding that even the tender of a bright new shilling seemed to have no effect on him, and fearing he should have a regular mob about him if the boy continued to make such a disturbance, prudently turned on his heel, and walked off without more ado, as fast as he could.

This occurred shortly before the arrival of Sir Reginald Clinton at Beaumont-house, and consequently not long previous to the death of Harrill, and the visit of Winthrop to the Clawthorp lunatic asylum.

But an event soon after took place of much greater importance to Edward, which we must now hasten to narrate to the reader, premising that it originated, as important events very often do, in a circumstance of a trifling commonplace nature.

One evening, the air being chilly, it occurred to the clump-footed porter of the workhouse, that the quart of beer allowed him by the guardians in virtue of his

office, would be much improved by having the chill taken off at the fire. Unfortunately, however, the little office attached to the porter's lodge was just then occupied by a magistrate and his clerk taking the examination of a newly admitted pauper, and the porter could not venture to intrude for the purpose of warming his beer at the office fire. Just as he was considering what to do, his eye fell upon Edward crossing the yard with his hands thrust into his pockets to keep them warm.

"Come here, you scamp—come here! Come here, I say!" cried the porter, raising his voice higher and higher, as Edward proceeded on his course without taking the least notice of the words addressed to him.

"You young scamp, I say, art deaf then? Ned Williams, I say!"

"I hear you now," said Edward; "but mind, whenever you call me 'scamp,' I'm as deaf as a post."

"I'll knock thy head off some day, my lord!" said the porter, who by this time had hobbled up to him; "but I've a job in hand for thee just now. Here, lay hold of this beer, and clap't in a saucepan on yon fire in the dining-hall. Dos't hear, lad? And bring't out to me at the gate, and I'll give thee a sup if thou'rt sharp about it."

So saying, the clump-footed porter hastened back to his post, and Edward, taking the beer-can, proceeded to the dining-hall, and, pouring the beer into a saucepan, was about to place it on the fire, when he was interrupted by a sudden uproar at the other end of the hall. Now we are sorry to say that fights and rows of various kinds were by no means infrequent in the workhouse, and consequently did not excite extraordinary attention among those not directly concerned. The Master himself leaned rather to the Yankee system of managing the different compartments of the establishment. His general plan was to leave matters alone, finding that things usually got right somehow or other.

It seemed, however, that on the present occasion Edward was more than usually interested, for he placed the saucepan hastily inside the grate, and ran towards the scene of contention with all his speed. The tables at the end of the room had been partly pushed on one side, and an open space made round which a crowd of men in the pauper dress were standing staring, with open mouths and eyes glimmering in a dull sort of way with unaccustomed enjoyment, at a fight going on between two men, one partly stripped, and the other clad in a working dress with a leather apron tucked up round his waist. Whilst the two men were pounding each other with

clenched fists, and the crowd, as we have said, gazed at the combatants with dull delight, shouting and encouraging them at every successful blow, another scene was enacted immediately outside the ring of spectators, of a different character, which seemed to create much less interest. A poor man partly stripped, like one of the combatants just named, sat on the floor, propped against the wall seemingly in acute pain. An old and infirm pauper knelt by the man's side, sometimes moistening his blue lips with water out of an earthenware mug; sometimes rubbing his chest and side in compliance with the gestures rather than with the words of the sufferer; sometimes giving a little shrill laugh and putting out his tongue to its full extent in a way which rendered the sanity of the old pauper doubtful; sometimes thrusting his white head forwards to see how the fight was going on.

Edward, having pushed his way to the front row of the spectators, not without receiving an occasional cuff under the ear, or a thrust in the ribs which nearly laid him prostrate, stood for a few moments watching the fight with a degree of breathless interest, which our readers will comprehend better when we explain, that the combatant with the leather apron tucked up round the waist was no other than David Price, the good-natured talkative

cobbler. Was he, then, a mere vulgar quarrelsome ruffian? This seems somewhat difficult to believe, but we will endeavour to explain the mystery.

There chanced to be in the workhouse at this time, a poor man afflicted by heart-complaint. As, however, he appeared at times quite well, it was decided that he should be placed with the other paupers, and only removed to the infirmary when an attack actually came on. Mrs. Medley, the matron, did not entirely approve of this arrangement, still the affair was no business of hers; and all she could do, knowing from having seen the man in the infirmary how much he occasionally suffered, was to persuade Mr. Matthew Maggs, the master—when, in their snug little sanctum, she, the master, and Mr. Cockitt were leisurely sipping their evening modicum of hot brandy and water—to appoint one of the paupers to keep an eye on the man, and the moment he was “taken bad” summon assistance, and remove him to the infirmary. This arrangement would have been more satisfactory if the individual selected for the purpose had been intelligent and able-bodied; but, as it happened, Mr. Maggs’ choice was an elderly decrepid pauper of weak intellect, whose principal employment at leisure moments was to thrust out his tongue to the full extent, and give the peculiar little shrill laugh we have just described. Now it was very

unfortunate, but so it was, and so Mr. Golightly, the surgeon, if he had taken the smallest trouble in the matter, could have easily ascertained, that the patient with the heart-complaint was a man of irritable excitable temper, and whenever he was provoked or in any way thwarted was apt to fall into a violent passion, and, when he fell into a passion, the next thing that happened was that one of his heart attacks came on. Well, then, this being the case, our friend David Price the cobbler, always set his face against the bullying and teasing which, we are sorry to say, were often practised against the poor man by many of the other paupers. It chanced, however, that on this particular day, before Price came in for his supper, a mischievous fellow began to worry and fret the man, and so provoked him that at last he flung half a mug-full of gruel in the face of his tormentor. No sooner was this done than up jumped the latter, and throwing off his coat challenged him to fight.

“A ring! a ring!” was the general cry, and in a minute the two men were face to face, and ready to commence the fight. But all of a sudden the poor man subject to heart-complaint sank to the ground without troubling his antagonist any further, smitten by the sharp spasms of the disease from which he suffered. The crowd of paupers stood for a moment in stupid sur-

prise. The aged idiot who had care of the man gave his shrill laugh and put out his tongue. The disappointed combatant prepared to put on his coat again. It may surprise some persons that such a disease should be so lightly regarded, and the sufferer from it so brutally maltreated. But they must bear in mind the ignorance, and, what is worse, the sullen selfish recklessness common amongst the inmates of union workhouses as so often conducted in this country, and they will probably cease to feel astonishment at what we have described.

Now it was at this particular juncture that Price arrived on the scene of action, and comprehending at a glance the state of the case, and wholly unable to restrain the indignation glowing in his honest heart, without a word walked up to the fellow who had been the cause of the mischief, and gave him so sound a box on one ear as would probably have felled him to the ground, had he not immediately followed it up by a blow on the other ear, which happily restored the man's equilibrium. All this was the work of a moment. The fellow thus energetically assailed, although taller and stronger than David Price, would probably have sneaked off; but egged on by the scoffs, jeers, and shouts of the assembled paupers, he plucked up courage, and, turning upon the cobbler, hit at him right and left, as fast as he could,

in hopes of crushing his antagonist at once. To this our friend replied by blows, which, if less powerful, were delivered with better aim, and with quite as hearty goodwill.

It was at this moment, then, that Edward forced his way to the front of the crowd, and stood gazing with clenched fists and beating heart, whilst hot tears of vehement sympathy and passion ran down his flushed cheeks. For a few seconds the fight was doubtful. But the man, not liking the way in which Price kept thumping the most vulnerable parts of his face, suddenly closed with him, and, after a short struggle, threw him to the ground, falling heavily upon him. Then not content with this measure of success clutched him so savagely by the throat that poor Price turned black in the face. Edward could not at this sight restrain himself any longer ; but, springing forwards, dealt the man so severe a kick on the side of the head, that he rolled off the cobbler as if he was shot, and lay for a few seconds half-senseless on the floor, with hands relaxed and mouth open.

The state of things in the workhouse dining-hall had now assumed so serious an aspect, that some of the more quietly disposed paupers ran to the master's private room, and raised an alarm that there was "murder"

going on in the hall. Meantime some of the paupers seized Edward, and would have exercised "Lynch law" upon him there and then, had it not been for Price, who, rising from the ground little the worse for the fall, called upon the paupers to "let the boy be," and to "fling a jug of water over t' other fellow on the floor." The cold water application in question had the desired effect, and thoroughly roused the man from his swoon before the arrival of Mr. Maggs, who came upon the scene in great wrath, having been called away in the middle of his tea.

"Now, what's all this? Who's at the bottom of all this? Come, speak out, or I'll make you! Speak out, I say!" shouted Mr. Maggs.

The paupers stared at one another, and said nothing. David Price busied himself in attending to the man suffering from heart-attack. His recent antagonist, having picked himself up from the floor, and pulled on his jacket, sat down on a distant bench, and endeavoured to throw an expression of touching innocence into a countenance which nature had marked as dangerous. Edward crept into a distant corner.

Mr. Maggs, not succeeding in getting an answer, began to deliver a series of lively execrations levied at every body in the room. This was interrupted by the cobbler's

coming up to him and whispering a few words in his ear to draw his attention to the prostrate form of the sick man. Mr. Maggs' countenance instantly changed, and, desiring that the patient should be removed to the infirmary without a moment's delay, he endeavoured, in a more quiet fashion than he had hitherto adopted, to find out how the bustle began. Not knowing the turn things might take, the man who had received Edward's kick on the head thought it the wisest course to pocket the affront and hold his tongue, whilst David Price, having accompanied the other man to the infirmary, was not present to throw any light on the subject. The master paced up and down the room endeavouring to get at the rights of the tumult. Suddenly his eye fell upon the saucepan of beer Edward had placed on the hearth, which, in the general confusion, had been upset, and the contents spilt over the floor.

"Beer!" exclaimed Mr. Maggs, with as much horror as if he had been a conscientious teetotaller—"Beer! Beer as I'm alive! Who dared bring beer into the dining-hall?" he continued, looking round for information. "Who dared to do it, I say?"

Several of the paupers, only too glad to divert the current of the master's indignation from themselves, shouted with one voice, "Ned Williams! Ned Wil-

liams!"—"I see him with my own eyes. 'Twas Ned Williams!"

"You young villain!" exclaimed Maggs, fixing his eyes upon Edward with a look of unutterable disgust and horror—"You incorrigible rogue and vagabond! 'Tis as clear as day. You've been selling drink to the paupers. I see it all. You've been corrupting the morals of the house. You wicked young pauper! You've been plying the men with liquor till they're as drunk as owls. A pretty game, indeed! Here, Cockitt! Cockitt! Cockitt!" And so saying Mr. Maggs shouted to Mr. Cockitt to come up to the hall. Edward meanwhile loudly denied that he had done or meant any harm, but what he said was but little heeded. To bring beer into the hall was an offence against the workhouse regulations, though an offence very often winked at. But the master was glad to find some one on whom to wreak his displeasure, and, giving over the lad to Mr. Cockitt, he directed that he should be first soundly flogged, and then locked up in solitary confinement for the night without his supper. Mr. Cockitt, nothing loth, seized Edward by the collar, and dragged him across the yard towards the school-room, where, having first deliberately taken off his own coat as well as the boy's, in order to give free play to his arms, he prepared to inflict the castigation ordered by the governor.

Meantime high words might have been heard issuing from the master's private room, in which were assembled the matron, the cobbler, the porter, and Mr. Maggs himself. The voice of the matron loudly predominated over the others; and, from the occasional words that reached the ears of the listeners outside, it was pretty evident that lady was expressing herself in strong, nay, even menacing terms towards the master of the workhouse. However that may be, one thing was clear, that in a very few minutes David Price issued abruptly from the room, and, hurrying as fast as he could to the school-room, laid hold of Cockitt's uplifted hand just as he had struck Edward over the shoulders two or three heavy blows, and was, as he afterwards expressed it, "getting warm to his work." So vigorously did our friend clutch Mr. Cockitt's wrist and wrench it round, that that gentleman was fain to give a howl of pain, followed up by an angry demand as to how he dared to "interfere in the school-room?" By this time, however, Mr. Maggs himself entered the room, and intimated to Cockitt that he had altered his mind, and should punish Edward to-morrow by several hours' stone-breaking, instead of a flogging and a night's solitary confinement. Accordingly Edward was released, and allowed to go to his supper with little other discom-

fort than a bleeding lip, which he had bitten in his effort not to cry out under the schoolmaster's blows.

"Thank thee, lad," said Price as they parted company that night. "Thank thee, lad, for helping an old fool who ought to have known better. But draw it milder, lad, another time, or you will do yourself and some one else more harm than you'd bargain for. You and I, lad, have had a lesson this day. But there, 'tis done now, and can't be mended. I got us both into trouble, but it was meant for the best. Give us thy hand, lad—give us thy hand; and Heaven send thee a better teacher than I am like to prove!"

The following day was board-day, and it so happened that being the first meeting of the guardians newly elected for the ensuing year, there was rather a full attendance.

Captain Clincher, R.N., was in the chair, and, after some preliminary business had been transacted, the relieving officer for the Winterbourne district was summoned to present his book with the names of applicants for relief, and of those whose relief was to be discontinued.

"What?" exclaimed the chairman. "Fifteen fresh paupers on! Only three struck off! This is sad work! What's the meaning of this, Mr. Priddle? Eh, Mr. Priddle?"

Mr. Priddle was a man of pale flabby complexion and lean limp body, who had a habit of going into a cold perspiration when any one in authority spoke to him in a loud voice. He had been elected relieving officer in consequence of his near relationship to a thriving miller in the district, with whom most of the guardians dealt. Mr. Priddle really wished to do what was right, but stood in such dread of the whole body of guardians, that he oftentimes, when delivering his books, did not know whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

“Eh? Mr. Relieving Officer, eh? This is a bad beginning for the new year. Fifteen on! only three off!”

Mr. Priddle wiped his forehead with a very crumpled pocket-handkerchief, and faintly observed that—“The sharp frost had stopped field-work.”

“Ay, ay!” exclaimed a stout guardian with a hoarse voice, Pocock by name, who was considered the wag of the Board, “always some excuse or other. When the frost breaks up, then we shall have the fever; and when the fever goes, then the frost will come back again. Out of the frying-pan into the fire.”

At this sally there was a laugh, and Mr. Priddle, emboldened by the merriment, replied with a feeble smile—

“Why, we’ve a little of both just now. There’s fever *and* frost.”

"What a *fool* he be, that Priddle!" growled Farmer Gubbins to his neighbour, Wiggles.

"Ah, *what* a fool he be, to be sure!" rejoined Wiggles.

"Bad, very bad, Mr. Relieving Officer!" rejoined Captain Clincher in a tone of remonstrance. "Well, who's first on the list? John Hodges. John and Mary Hodges. How many children? One. Two. Three. What? Four! Five! Six! You don't say so, Mr. Relieving Officer? Seven! Seven children!! Is it possible, Mr. Relieving Officer?"

Now it should be observed that this tone of astonishment was not adopted from any real surprise on the part of the chairman. He was well acquainted with the Hodges' family, and had helped them out of his own purse to make up their rent last Michaelmas. It was adopted instinctively or mechanically. Any thing like apathy in a chairman under such circumstances as a family of nine persons applying for relief, would have been considered highly criminal by the guardians at large. So Captain Clincher was "astonished" as a matter of duty, and not to weaken his influence over the body of which he was the presiding head.

Mr. Priddle hung down his head and looked guilty, as if in some way morally accountable for the number of Hodges' children, but thought it best to say nothing.

"Well," proceeded the chairman, "let us see. Eldest child thirteen years old. Strike him off, he's old enough to earn his living. Next is twelve years old. Strike him off. That leaves five. Man wholly disabled by rheumatism. But isn't the wife able to earn any thing? Washing, charring, pulling weeds, hoeing wheat? What, nothing? Baby at the breast, has she? Oh dear! oh dear! Well, that's seven in all. Can't give less than five shillings and six loaves, eh, Mr. Wiggles?"

"Mr. Chairman, it's my opinion that the man can do a little work if he choose," observed Wiggles, solemnly winking one eye.

"Oho!" said Pocock. "He's a bird that *can* sing and *won't* sing, is he, Mr. Wiggles?"

"What does the surgeon say?" asked Nugent.

"The man is here, if you'd like to see him. He's a thatcher by trade, and isn't much of a hand at any thing else," uttered the relieving officer in a meek voice.

"I move," said Mr. Wiggles rising, "that he have only four shillings and sixpence instead of five shillings."

"Beg to second that motion," said Mr. Gubbins.

"The surgeon says he's wholly disabled," interposed Nugent, reading from the surgeon's report.

"Well, well, send the man in, Priddle—send him in!" said the chairman.

The man limped into the room, took off his hat, and scratched his head.

"Now, John Hodges," said the chairman in a raised voice, "what's the matter with you?"

"I've the rheumatiz terrible bad. Can't lift my hand to my mouth."

"Can't you?" said Pocock. "I'll be bound you could if you had hold of a gallon of beer."

At this sally the twenty-four guardians roared in chorus.

"Well, John Hodges, and what do you want? How much can you do with?"

John Hodges scratched his head, and said he thought he could do with ten shillings a-week and a loaf or two, whereat the twenty-four guardians laughed in considerable derision, and Hodges was informed that he might withdraw.

"Well, is it to be four and sixpence or five shillings?" said the chairman, looking inquiringly round.

"Four and six," replied Wiggles sternly.

"Come, come!" remonstrated the chairman. "You're a little hard upon him. Another sixpence won't hurt. Come, come!"

"The boy of twelve," said Nugent, "is at school, and Mr. Lovell, our clergyman, says he is doing well. It

seems a pity to take him away from school and put him to work so young. I shall vote for the five shillings."

"Well, Mr. Wiggles," said the chairman. "Won't you give in? Come now—come!"

"School? A pauper's no business at school!" rejoined Wiggles contemptuously. "Put it to the vote, Mr. Chairman."

The guardians were equally divided; but the Chairman, a good-natured man at bottom, gave the casting vote in favour of the larger sum.

"Next case," Clincher went on, "Arabella Pinch. Arabella, indeed! Well, that's a fine name for a pauper. She's only in part able to support herself, the surgeon says. What can Mrs. Pinch do for herself, Mr. Relieving Officer?"

"She does a little sewing, sir; earns a shilling or eighteenpence a-week; but it's not constant."

"Would she come into the house?" asked Mr. Gubbins.

"I rather think not."

"Offer her the house, then!" rejoined Mr. Gubbins, thumping the table emphatically.

"But what sort of character is the woman?" asked Colonel Clair.

Mr. Gubbins winked, shrugged his shoulders, shook

his head, and finally grinned. These telegraphic signals seemed perfectly intelligible to the guardians, as there was an immediate exclamation of—"Offer her the house, Priddle!" all round the table.

"Very well, Arabella Pinch to be offered the house," read the chairman, as, yielding to the general wish, he made the requisite entry in the book before him.

"Stop," said Gubbins; "*Pinch*, is it? I thought 'twas *Finch*—Harriet Finch."

Now Harriet Finch was an old woman of sixty, who in ancient times had not borne the best of characters, but had long ago amended her ways. Nevertheless, Farmer Gubbins thought it as well to keep her off the rates, seeing that he was the largest ratepayer in Mugglebury parish. But Arabella Pinch was a different person. He didn't know any thing against her. So Arabella Pinch was allowed relief out of the house; and, if the reader would like to know the reason why Mr. Gubbins was so lenient to Arabella Pinch, it was this: Arabella Pinch was *not* chargeable to Mr. Gubbins' parish, having resided there five years, and having a settlement elsewhere. So she was what is called a "common fund case," and the cost of her relief was chargeable to the whole union, and not to Mugglebury in particular.

Harriet Finch's case came on next.

"Well," said Pocock, "you'll bag your bird this time, Gubbins. Finch is to be offered the house, is she?"

"By all means," said Gubbins. "She'll never come into it. She'll half-starve first."

"Well, and if she's a bad 'un," remarked another guardian, "'twill do her good."

Here, however, Colonel Clair, who knew both the women whose cases had been under consideration, started the difficulty that Arabella Pinch *was* a woman of indifferent character, whereas Harriet Finch, for the last twenty years, had behaved with perfect propriety. So it was finally decided, as the chairman remarked, "to put them both in the same boat," and give them temporary relief out of the house.

The next case was an unfortunate man who had recently settled in the neighbourhood with a wife and family, having left his former home in order to better his condition. An accident in the mines had disabled him for a time, and owing to sickness amongst his children occurring when he himself was laid up, he was compelled to apply for relief to the parish officers. This was the signal for the guardians immediately applying for an order of removal, the effect of which would be to send him back against his will, like a convicted

culprit, to the parish of his settlement a hundred miles off, where he knew that nothing but rags and starvation awaited him.

"I was earning, gentlemen, afore I was took bad, fifteen shilling a week. I sha'n't earn nine in my own parish. There are too many mouths there already."

"Hard case!" said the chairman. "Very hard case! Perhaps your parish will accept you, and empower us to relieve you here. Clerk, make out a copy of the pauper's examination, and send it before next board-day to the Bethnal Green Guardians. We can but try. Now, then, next case?"

In this way the business proceeded, and after the various applications for relief, and for discontinuance of relief had been decided, some other matters of a more general character were discussed, and the board finally broke up.

Nugent sought out the schoolmaster and the master of the workhouse, to inquire about Ned Williams, *alias* Harrill, but was staggered by the frightful catalogue of offences laid at his door. He began to think the only chance for the boy was to send him to a reformatory school, conducted on an unusually strict system. Mr. Cockitt, who did not wish to lose him until he had given him a thorough good thrashing, thought in a few weeks

such a step might be expedient; but that, at present, the most wholesome policy for the boy's good "in this world and the next"—here Mr. Cockitt rolled his bilious eyes as if oppressed by pious excitement—"would be to humble him thoroughly in his present sphere of probation." No punishment elsewhere, would have so good an effect as in the locality where his offences had been perpetrated. "He ought to be 'umblid in this very 'ouse," added Cockitt, firmly planting one large foot on the rug as if he had suddenly discovered a beetle or cockroach there. Mr. Maggs, however, whose anger was very different to that of Cockitt's, and, if easily roused, was prompt enough to evaporate, declared with energy, that the sooner the boy was clear of the house, the better for himself and every body else. Nugent, who did not feel favourably impressed by Cockitt's demeanour, expressed a wish to see the lad. This, Cockitt did not by any means approve, fearing it might encourage the lad to accomplish the task of punishment allotted to him, and so save him from the chastisement he yearned to inflict upon him. He begged Nugent, with almost tearful agitation, not to see the lad for a day or two. Mr. Cockitt had hopes of him. He seemed on the mend. But a visit from Nugent would unsettle his mind, and do mischief. Would Mr. Nugent put off seeing the lad till to-morrow or even

next board day ? Thus appealed to, Nugent was inclined to give way, when David Price the cobbler tapped at the door, and said the matron was very anxious to see Mr. Nugent for five minutes in her private room. Nugent instantly complied, leaving Cockitt in a state of mind any thing but enviable.

She was a good-natured, though very imperfectly-educated woman this Mrs. Medley, and in old times, when Nugent had sometimes served as an elected guardian, they had been always on good terms together.

“Oh ! Mr. Nugent, I’m main glad you’re a guardian again. We’ve had sad work lately ! Not that I’m inclinable to split upon Mr. Maggs, he being civil enough, and talebearing I can’t abide. But I do wish, Mr. Nugent, you would say a word for poor Ned Williams——”

“Williams ? Oh, you mean Edward Harrill ?”

“He as come from Rentworth mines last autumn was twelvemonth. They say his father was one of the rioters as the yeomanry was out about. Nobody knows much of him, but yesterday he got into trouble all along of two men fighting, and they’ve been and put him to stone-breaking, and they will break his heart next, that they will.”

Nugent made the woman give him a full account

of the disturbance of the day before, and then, after asking a few questions about the boy's general conduct, stepped into the stone-breaking yard, and found Edward seated before a heap of stones, consisting of about a cart-load and a half, which he was cracking, in a dull mechanical sort of way, with an iron hammer. The boy looked pale and ill, and, on inquiry, Nugent found he had had nothing but a morsel of bread and a drink of water that day, the instructions being that he should have nothing more until he had broken half a load of stones.

The boy no sooner saw Nugent than a kind of faint light crept over his countenance, and without rising from the ground, where he was seated on an old piece of sack-cloth, he quietly took off his cap, and waited for Nugent first to speak to him.

"Well, Edward Harrill, and how long have you been here?"

"Longer than I like, Squire Nugent."

"How came you here, then? What has become of your father? How was it you left me after the riots?"

These questions, being somewhat complicated, Edward thought it safer to reply, simply and comprehensively, that he "didn't know."

"But why did you run away after the riots?"

"Because I was afraid of the soldiers," answered Edward somewhat sullenly, for he did not like admitting that he was afraid of any thing.

"I am sorry to hear you are not a good boy."

"I know I'm not ; nor nobody else is in this place."

"Well, if I take you away with me, will you serve me honestly and faithfully, as a good Christian ought to do?"

"I don't know," said Edward, "but I'll try hard;" and, so saying, he sprang on his feet, whilst his careworn countenance flushed with surprise and pleasure. "I'll try hard, sir!" he added anxiously, seeing that Nugent seemed to hesitate.

"Well, Edward, I think I shall trust you. Go on with your stone-breaking for a few minutes, and I'll come back to you again."

So saying, Nugent returned into the house to discuss the matter with the master, leaving Edward breaking stones with as much alacrity as if the employment was one of intense gratification. It was a very easy matter to accomplish Edward's removal from the workhouse, and, in half an hour or so, the lad was seated beside Nugent, wrapped in a rough pea-coat purchased for him at a shop in the vicinity and thrown over his pauper costume, travelling along the road to Okenham in a light phaeton, drawn by his new master's fast-stepping horse.

Great as was the contrast, and intense the sensation of relief, Edward had nevertheless scarcely refrained from tears in parting from the two friends who, during his incarceration at Flintwood, had saved him from utter misery and despair; we mean David Price, the cobbler, and Mrs. Medley, the matron, both of whom bade him farewell with many kind wishes, and a few words of honest counsel.

We may as well add here, that the disturbance at the workhouse which had thus brought Edward more particularly under Nugent's notice, produced results of some importance to other persons besides Edward, and indeed to the inmates of the workhouse generally. The patient in the infirmary suffering from the disease of the heart, never rallied, but after lingering some few days expired. Reports got about that the man had been murdered. There was talk of a coroner's inquest; but, however, the matter ended in an investigation into the whole affair by a poor-law inspector sent down for the purpose. Mr. Maggs was recommended, in terms which did not permit of unnecessary delay, to resign his situation. Mr. Cockitt was summarily and publicly ejected from his situation, various delinquencies having been brought home to him during the progress of the investigation, some of which were of so dark a character

as to render him liable to an indictment at common law.

In consequence of these changes the following advertisements appeared shortly after in the local newspapers.

The first was as follows:—

"FLINTWOOD UNION WORKHOUSE.—Wanted, a Master for the Union-house in consequence of the present master's resignation through severe indisposition. Salary, £30 with food, candles, &c. A man of energetic active mind without children indispensable, and if in the police force, or acquainted with prison discipline, would be preferred. Must understand accounts, and furnish testimonials in his own handwriting, together with securities for the discharge of his duties. Apply, &c. &c. &c.

The other advertisement ran thus:—

FLINTWOOD UNION.—Wanted immediately, a Schoolmaster. Salary, £20 a year, with board, lodging, candles, and such an additional amount as the committee of council may or may not award. The candidates must have good recommendations from their last employers, and no children. Apply, &c. &c. &c.

N.B.—A tailor would be preferred.

The latter advertisement not giving entire satisfaction to the poor-law board was subsequently modified, and the result of the whole was that a rather better stamp of master and schoolmaster was secured, greatly to the advantage of the inmates of the workhouse, both old and young.

Nevertheless, so long as the supreme local control of such establishments rests in men selected for the office of guardian with little regard to character, disposition, or general competency, we can scarcely hope union workhouses as a general rule will be other than they too often are at present—places where some misery is certainly relieved, but where much is inflicted; where the young are depressed under a system that unfits them for battling with the coming trials of life; where middle-aged and old are huddled together, without regard to character or previous conduct; where not merely the physical comfort of the inmates is kept at a low ebb, but their moral and intellectual welfare too commonly set at nought.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIDE IN CHALLICOMBE LANE.

It was at first Nugent's intention to employ Edward in some menial capacity about the premises, such as looking after the live-stock, or superintending field operations. Accordingly, for a week or so, Nugent gave him in charge to Madocks, with an injunction that he was to take care of him, take him about with him, and see what he was fit for. Of an evening he was to attend an evening adult school Lovell had established in the village. Now it chanced that Nugent did not during this time see much of Edward, and, being engrossed in business, had almost forgotten his existence, when an incident occurred which to some extent altered his plans concerning him.

Nugent, one night feeling unwell, had retired early to rest, when he remembered that he had left a letter open on his writing-table. He therefore rose hastily, and quietly opened his bedroom door for the purpose of

going down-stairs to fetch it. On the rug outside the door he saw a figure, which sprang to its feet the moment Nugent appeared, and would have escaped had not Nugent promptly laid hold of it and detected it was Edward Harrill. Not wishing to frighten Gertrude by any disturbance, Nugent drew the lad gently to his dressing-room, and, striking a light, proceeded to ask him rather sharply what business he had at his door, and what he was doing? The boy looked sullen, and would not answer, insomuch that Nugent made some vague allusion to the expediency of applying a good ash stick to his shoulders. "Wish you would!"—said the boy, looking up for a moment with a strange gleam of satisfaction on his countenance—"Wish you would beat me! I'd rather you beat me than take no notice of me." Nugent looked at the lad more attentively, and saw that he seemed to have been crying.

"Wish you'd kill me rather than throw me on one side, and forget me."

"Well," pursued Nugent, "but why do you skulk at my door, and what have you got your clothes on for? Why are not you in bed?"

"I don't want any bed! I hate going to bed! I hate every thing!"

"Your master into the bargain, I suppose!"

The boy looked up at Nugent with an expression of attachment and reverence which was a sufficient answer to the question.

"If you care for me, why do not you tell me the truth? What were you about just now?"

"I heard you were ill," answered the boy in a low voice, "and I wasn't comfortable unless I was near you. So I just lay down on the mat. 'Tis not the first time."

Nugent again looked at the boy's downcast face, and, stroking his dark matted hair back from his forehead, told him in a cheerful voice to go to bed, and not to be so foolish any more. Nevertheless the circumstance made an impression on Nugent's mind, and he felt a tenderness for the lad to which he had been before a stranger. Nugent, with all his reserve, had a strong yearning for the affection of others. He earnestly desired to be loved, cherished, sought after, and in the dimness and perplexity that overspread his marriage life, the feeling that this poor forsaken lad clung to him with a sort of passionate adoration, gave him comfort and satisfaction almost against his will.

So, after a good deal of reflection, he determined to keep the lad about his person, and to attend to his general training and education more than he had at first intended. Previous to his incarceration in Flintwood

workhouse, and before Mrs. Harrill's decease, Edward had been regularly at school, and had made rapid progress for his age in whatever he was set to learn.

His memory was good and his ear quick. He had soon acquired the faculty, not merely of reading, but of reading with ease and pleasure. His aptitude also for catching the correct pronunciation of words, and for giving what he said just accent and expression, was unusual. All this had been checked and repressed by his sojourn at Flintwood. He had learnt little there which was beneficial except what the poor cobbler had imparted to him. He had learnt much that was harmful, and a temper naturally sweet had been soured by capricious ill-usage and by the smouldering sense of injustice. Meantime his bodily condition was far from satisfactory. The scanty and not always wholesome fare of the Union had told upon him unfavourably; weak soups, rice, milk, and such like slops, with insufficient supplies of bread, had weakened his system, whilst his limbs were shrunk through want of adequate use and exercise. These physical ailments gradually disappeared under the influence of a better but by no means luxurious diet, and abundance of out-door exercise often carried to the verge of excessive fatigue. But the moral mischief was more difficult to eradicate. Nevertheless, progress was made

even here, whilst in the general training of his mental faculties great advance was made, thanks to Lovell's evening school, and to Nugent's own exertions. Gradually, therefore, Edward became more of a companion than a servant, assisting Nugent in all matters connected with the farm, and carrying out his directions with fidelity and zeal. He kept Nugent's accounts, and occasionally his farm journal; and, as his manners improved with the improvement of his mind, was looked upon by strangers rather as a young secretary or clerk than as a menial dependent. Having been for three or four weeks absent at an agricultural college, whither Nugent sent him to learn the method of preparing and applying some new species of chemical manure, when he returned, the difference in his manner and bearing, from mixing for a short time with young men, all of them respectable and many of them refined and gentlemanly, was very striking.

Nugent, as he watched his slim and well-knit form, acquiring, as time passed on, an elasticity and grace uncommon in the usual run of lads, could not but call to mind the hints Margaret Harrill had let fall relative to the boy's parentage. She had intimated that the mother was of gentle blood, and that some other than Harrill was his father. But this rested simply on Harrill's own unsupported statement to Margaret. And

what was it worth ? As for Harrill he was dead and gone. The only man who could by any possibility throw any light on the matter was Weston, who became intimately associated with Harrill soon after his arrival in the parish. Nugent, however, had not seen Weston since the day he encountered him at Clawthorp asylum ; nor did he particularly wish to fall in with him again. He regarded him as a dangerous character, and for Lucy's sake thought Weston was better at a distance from Okenham.

He did not communicate any of his vague speculations on the subject of Edward's parentage to Gertrude. He thought it was not delicate to discuss such matters with her. Thus it happened that Gertrude, in common with most people in the vicinity, considered Edward to be Harrill's son.

Having now seen Edward established at the Manor Farm, we must proceed to the more immediate subject of the present chapter.

The summer sun was shining full upon the latticed windows of the Manor Farm, and casting broken, flickering rays through the leafy branches of the walnut-trees on the lawn, streaking the smooth grass with soft gleams of light. But under the shadow of the huge Scotch fir, all was dusky twilight, for no ray penetrated

its thickly-woven, spiky foliage. Under it sat Gertrude, on her favourite garden seat, and perhaps it was the dimness of the light which made her countenance, once tinted with so pure a crimson, seem now so delicately pale. She had on her lap Tennyson's "Maud," but her eyes were not on the page before her, but were gazing on vacancy, though occasionally her lips moved faintly as if she was murmuring her thoughts aloud.

So absorbed was she that she did not hear Nugent's footstep as he advanced towards her from the further end of the lawn, and it was not until his hand was gently placed on her shoulder that she recognised his presence.

Why did so sudden a flush suffuse her uplifted face? Was it pleasurable surprise? Was it mere nervous sensitiveness at the sudden interruption? Was it that her thoughts were such as she felt might not be entirely pleasing to her husband?

"My love," said Nugent, "here is a note from your mother. She is trying to make up a riding party for the young people, and wishes you to chaperon them. Will you go, dear? Clinton is paying another visit at Beaumont-house, and will be one of the party."

Gertrude paused, and when we pause before we reply to an agreeable request, the result is not difficult to foresee.

"I believe Agatha and Jessie are very anxious I should go with them. But will not you come, too? We are going to Challicombe Lane."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I have just promised to give Edward Harrill a lesson in land-surveying. Besides, there is a man coming about the wool at two o'clock. So, you see my hands are tied."

Gertrude closed her book, and, rising from her chair, whilst her eyes lit up with a transient excitement, said—

"Well, dear, then I think I will go. Please tell Edward to order the bay mare at two o'clock. I will run in and answer the note."

"I will go to the stable myself," answered Nugent. "I must see if the mare's off-foot is all right."

They parted, one to scribble a few lines in the drawing-room, the other to the stable. Here, attended by Edward, now his constant companion, Nugent examined the bay mare's off-foot, and learnedly discussed its sanitary prospects with the groom.

We must, however, favour the reader with some explanation of a circumstance which may else perplex him.

How was it that Nugent appeared to have waived his objection to Gertrude's associating with Sir Reginald Clinton? Was it that he felt ashamed of his highly

wrought religious scruples? Was it that Lady Maud's remonstrances had, after all, exercised a secret influence over his mind? To neither of these causes was the change in Nugent's feelings towards Sir Reginald mainly attributable. Rather it arose from a personal regard which had sprung up in Nugent's mind, and induced him to some extent, and within certain limits, to cultivate an intimacy from which he first shrank with distaste. And this personal regard took its root, not in any thing Sir Reginald had done for Nugent, but just the reverse. Nugent had saved Sir Reginald's life on the night of the inundation at the river's mouth. Consequently, as is the case with many men, Nugent felt kindly disposed towards one whom he had so signally served. We often like those whom we have put under an obligation. They become, as it were, a part of ourselves, remind us of our merits, and are regarded as friends, because the chances are that they are gratefully disposed towards us. Nugent's generous nature warmed towards Clinton. He had done Clinton one good service. Why not another? Providence had thrown them together. Ought not Nugent to endeavour to avail himself of the opportunity almost forced upon him against his will? Might he not in some degree, however small, shake Clinton's religious delusions, and bring to

bear upon him the light of Protestant truth, as yet perhaps never properly revealed to him ?

Still Nugent, though he frequently met Clinton, and did not object to Gertrude's meeting him in company with others, drew the line broadly enough. He did not invite him to his house. It was chiefly at Lady Maud's, or at houses in the neighbourhood, that they came together.

It is true that Clinton avoided for the most part theological discussion, and generally led the conversation to the milder regions of literature, politics, or science. Nevertheless, Nugent was able, so he believed, to throw in now and then a word which might suggest useful trains of reflection, or open a vista of inquiry likely to do good. Intimate he scarcely was as yet, but he rather hoped to be so, and possibly might have been, had there not been something in Nugent's manner and tone not exactly provocative of confidence. Integrity and goodness of heart, with no lack of vigorous judgment, were his. But there was wanting that capacity for entire sympathy, that anxiety to make allowance for our worst failings, and put the best complexion on a bad case, which mostly moves us to lay bare our secret griefs and distresses. Clinton, then, was on good terms with Nugent, but the latter never advanced

beyond a certain point. He did not penetrate the recesses of the other's mind, or only penetrated far enough to discern, that there lurked within it some unknown care or grief which Clinton did not choose to reveal to him.

Let us now follow Gertrude to the green and shady lane, Chalicombe by name, along which the riding-party Lady Maud had busied herself to arrange was proceeding at a leisurely pace. The company, as is often the case in such excursions, had broken off into pairs. First rode Sir Eliot Prichard with Jessie Usherwood; then followed Miss Eliot Prichard, a lady with a hook nose and a sparkling eye, who, having passed the heyday of her youth, thought it necessary to exhibit extraordinary activity both physical and mental by way of proving she was at all events not sinking into decrepitude. She dragged in her train Colonel Clair, who rather liked her because she saved him the trouble of talking. Moreover, having known her from a lad, when she was always considered the belle of Rentworth, he imagined her to be so still, and was not a little proud of being selected as her *preux chevalier*, and he too a married man. Mr. Edgar Clair followed, a shy young man on a skittish horse, which every body seemed afraid of. Consequently poor Mr. Edgar Clair kept away from every

body out of deference to public feeling, very red in the face from the exertion of holding in his brute of a horse, which pulled incessantly during the whole of the ride. At a respectful distance followed Agatha, and by her side Lovell, who, by the merest accident of course, was riding home from a clerical breakfast, and met the party at the corner of the lane. Lastly, followed Gertrude and Sir Reginald Clinton.

Sir Eliot was arguing with Jessie on the abstract nature of "beauty," and affronted all her instincts, both of reason and imagination, by contending there was no such thing at all. Colonel Clair was listening with an air of chivalric attention to Miss Eliot Prichard's history of the origin and progress of the Swampshire family. Poor Edgar Clair was apparently performing one of the feats of horsemanship, common at Astley's circus, and making his horse dance the "Schottische." Agatha and Lovell were discussing some grave theological question.

Gertrude was for the moment silent; and her face looked sad. They were passing near the tall, stately walnut-tree, under whose twilight shadow Nugent two years before had first made known to her his love, and where she had given him her hand. How different were her feelings now! Not that she had ceased to love

Nugent. She loved him still. But her affection was mixed with bitterness; sometimes checked and suppressed by vexation of spirit, sometimes disturbed by misgivings, doubts, and fears. How little had she guessed or foreseen the trials of wedded life! How little had she tried to prepare herself for them! How promptly had she concluded that the one thing needful for the happiness of those who marry is what the world calls love! That is, for the most part a freak of the heart or of the fancy, roused by a handsome face or a musical voice, an expressive eye, or a knack of conversing so as either to touch the feelings or amuse the mind.

"You seem depressed at the sight of that old walnut," said Clinton.

Gertrude blushed.

"What a curious thing it is," continued Clinton, "that our happiness is ever at the mercy of the outward world! You may have never noticed that tree before. Yet, from some mysterious force of association, it touches a chord in your heart, and makes it vibrate with pain. So, in our dreams, the imagination perpetually stumbles against some fresh object that checks the current of ideas, and whirls them away in a totally new direction."

"I have sometimes," said Gertrude, "awaked with a

sigh of bitterness, my heart throbbing, and my whole spirit crushed beneath some deep affliction. Yet I could not tell why. I remember no cause for my grief, and in a little while the feeling disappears."

"It is the sorrow left by some forgotten dream," answered Clinton; "the impression of a thought that has passed across your brain, and cannot be recalled. The substance is gone, only the shadow remains."

"Does that explain," asked Gertrude, "the vague conviction we now and then feel, that a scene or circumstance occurring in our presence has happened before, and that more than once?"

"Sometimes it may," answered Clinton. "But, I confess, I like to play with an idea, and speculate whether man's probation may not be carried on through more than one individual existence, and that sometimes we are acting over again passages of a previous life. It cuts the knot of so many difficulties!"

"But," rejoined Gertrude, "I thought, as a Catholic, your conscience was handed over to your priest, and you had no right to have any difficulties?"

"Well, that is abstractedly true," said Clinton, as a graver expression crossed his countenance. "But, though we may firmly believe all will be one day explained, it is not presumptuous to muse on these

matters reverently, and with a mind prepared at any moment to obey the decisions of Holy Church. The intellect may struggle at times in the throes of involuntary perplexity—

‘Dim as the borrow’d beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,
Is reason to the soul’—

But so the heart be right, the inward doubt, the secret agony, matters little.”

Gertrude hesitated to utter what passed through her mind; namely, that the Roman Church, it would then seem, did not give greater real peace to her children than any other communion.

Clinton, however, gathered from her looks what crossed her mind, and added—

“All Catholics, Mrs. Nugent, are not bigots. I should be loath to judge those who, having been brought up in another faith, shrink with pain from the communion to which I, by birth and education, and the efficacy of sacraments, am indissolubly united. Much that I see in the church perplexes and depresses me. Nevertheless, here is my spiritual home—here must I strive, with such light and help as are vouchsafed to me, to work out my salvation. Rather would I remain here, where

I know the worst, but also know the best, than 'fly to evils which I know not of.' The outward forms and ceremonies may be polluted by man's invention; nay, the very doctrines of the true faith may be mixed with what is offensive and false; and yet, humility, patience, and even faith, may induce us to remain where we are, and do our best day by day in the situation allotted to us."

"But if there are errors in the Roman Church that put stumbling-blocks in the way of salvation, is it not right to denounce them?"

"Right," answered Clinton, "for some. Right for those who have for years been steadily pressing forwards in the way of godliness. Right for those not bowed down by the memory of past crimes, and by the consciousness of present weakness. Right for such, it may be, but not for all—not for all!"

And Clinton's countenance again grew dark.

"I should be tempted by the confessional," said Gertrude. "I have always thought the idea of confessing one's sins very soothing."

"As a method of humbling the soul it is useful; apart, I mean, from the grace conferred," replied Clinton. "But the young and imaginative would be disappointed. There are many secret suffer-

ings which few priests can touch; nor, if they could, would they have time in dealing with a multitude of penitents. For there are sorrows—sorrows I mean not exclusively connected with sin—for which no human remedy is to be found, except in the sympathy of a heart that can feel with us, and the compassion of a spirit that will not judge us too harshly.”

There was a tenderness in Clinton's manner as he said these words, and lifted his dark eyes for a moment to Gertrude's face, which touched her. What was dwelling on his mind? What secret care oppressed and vexed him? Could she give him any consolation, however faint? It was a Christian duty to console the afflicted. Yet why was it then she felt a secret misgiving, a doubt whether or no it was right to encourage him to unfold his sorrow more distinctly? The answer is simple enough. It was no business of hers. Her duty did not lie that way. Other claims appealed to her conscience more strongly. But Gertrude, in the absence of that entire oneness and sympathy with her husband, so essential to earthly peace and firmly-grounded happiness, was restless and anxious for excitement. She had secret cares herself, and a craving for sympathy which rendered her anxious to bestow the same on others. For the passion of sympathy

is contagious, and ever tends to react on the heart which calls it forth. So—bending a little over her saddle and casting down her dark blue eyes until they were almost veiled beneath their long silken lashes—she said,

“Trials there are for most of us, Sir Reginald—trials often hard to be borne; but certainly those are the most bitter which we have to endure in silence. Yet it is rare that men need hold their peace. They can choose their friends; they can freely traverse the world until they have found one in whom they may trust. With women it is otherwise. They must suffer in solitude.”

Clinton was silent for a few minutes, but his face expressed regret and pity rather than any tenderer emotion. Then he went on in rather a lighter tone—

“After all, our good old Johnson was right in advising those in trouble, to reflect how many were much worse off than themselves. I feel ashamed when I think of the real, unmitigated misery—far worse than my own—which hundreds are at this moment enduring!”

Meantime, Sir Eliot Prichard was conversing thus to Miss Jessie Usherwood—

“My dear Miss Jessie Usherwood, beauty has no abstract existence. John Chinaman’s perfection of

beauty is a lady with squinting eyes and crunched-up feet."

"Oh, that's all habit! But what do you say to beautiful scenery?"

"All association—entirely association! It was Walter Scott taught us to admire rocky ravines and rushing streams. We think we see romantic Highlanders at every corner, and hear the echoes of the pibroch in the pauses of the blast. Nobody used to care for grand scenery. People shuddered at it, and only thought of rheumatism and highway robbery. Look at our poets—Pope, Goldsmith——"

"Milton?" suggested Jessie.

Miss Eliot Prichard was just winding up her history of the Swampshire family—

"So you see that unfortunate affair of the paralytic butler complicated the matter to such an extent, that the seventh Marchioness was heard privately to express her opinion to her personal friend, the Honourable Mrs. MacEarwig, that life was a burden, and the sooner it was ended the better."

"Be quiet, sir! Steady now, poor fellow! Walk, you brute!" exclaimed Mr. Edgar Clair to his horse.

"A deep chancel, an east window with stained

glass, open oak-seats with not too much varnish on them," Lovell was saying.

"And an industrial school for twelve deserving girls selected from the national school, within an easy distance of the church," added Agatha.

Meantime Gertrude, in reply to Clinton's last remark, was saying—"Oh! that is very well in theory, but hard to carry out into practice. Some natures suffer so much more than others."

"Those who suffer most enjoy most," answered Clinton. "But I see Miss Eliot Prichard wishes to speak to us. Some day," he added, lowering his voice—"when we are friends of longer date, I may perhaps venture to tell you a little of my past history, but I feel it would be presuming too much to do so now."

"Sir Reginald!" exclaimed Miss Eliot Prichard, playfully tapping his horse on the neck, and thereby nearly sending him off at a gallop, "Sir Reginald—dear me—I beg you a thousand pardons—your horse seems fresh! The celebrated preacher, Dr. Mullikins, is going to preach at Saltmarsh next Sunday—'tis the next parish to Okenham, and Lady Maud and all of us think of going, and putting up between services at the Manor-house, if Mrs. Nugent will have us—Will you come?"

"I!" exclaimed Clinton. "Why should I go to hear Dr. Mullikins?"

"Because he's a great controversialist, and abuses the papists so," answered Miss Eliot Prichard.

"That's a queer reason for going to hear him," remarked her brother. "But I suppose Clinton will say it 'amuses the doctor, and don't hurt me.'"

"He's a violent man," said Lovell. "He will do more harm than good."

"Sir Reginald's afraid, I see!" exclaimed Miss Eliot Prichard.

"I shall be very happy," answered Clinton, "to make one of the party."

"Very spirited, Sir Reginald. And now then for a gallop!" And so saying, Miss Eliot Prichard whipped her horse, and off the whole party went. Poor Mr. Edgar Clair's horse took the lead at a frantic pace, and in about ten minutes was out of sight, making straight home with a determination of purpose which his worn-out rider either was unable or unwilling to restrain.

"Agatha, my dear," asked Lady Maud on their return home from their ride. "How did you enjoy your ride? I hope Sir Reginald was agreeable."

"Yes, pretty well—I believe so."

"You believe so—how cautious we are! And how did Mr. Edgar Clair get on with that horrid horse?"

"Oh! it ran away with him at last, and what became of him I can't say; but I hope he is safe at home."

"What a pity! It must have been so dull for Gertrude with no one to talk to."

Agatha was a straightforward young lady, and hereupon said, throwing her arms round her mother's neck and sitting beside her on the sofa in her dressing-room—

"Darling mamma—Mr. Lovell joined us, and I had such a pleasant ride. I hope it was not wrong."

Lady Maud saw that all her arrangements had been scattered to the winds. She was silent till the vexation had subsided, a practice which people of higher pretensions to religious principles than Lady Maud would do well to observe. Then she exclaimed in almost soft accents—

"Dear child, your heart will get entangled, and then separation will be an affliction. Now it would be a week's uneasiness, nothing more."

Agatha could only blush, and, looking at her watch, endeavoured to make her escape by alleging it was time to dress for dinner. Lady Maud kissed her, and pressed her hand. Then, as she was leaving the room, exclaimed—

"By the bye, dear, just take this *Times* newspaper down to the library, and leave it as you pass. Sir Reginald is always so anxious to see it."

Agatha took the paper and hurried away. Outside her mother's room she met her sister Gertrude, who was going to dine and sleep at Beaumont House. Fearing she should be late, Agatha handed her the newspaper to take down with her. Clinton was pacing up and down the library, and Gertrude, observing that his eye was immediately fixed upon the *Times*, offered it to him with a good-natured smile. He took it hastily, and began to scan the advertisements without moving from the spot. As Gertrude reached the other end of the room she looked back for an instant, and noticed to her surprise that Sir Reginald Clinton was deeply agitated. His hand trembled perceptibly, and his face was as pale as marble. Perhaps this would not have made much impression upon her, had not she observed during the whole evening that Clinton still continued pale and excited. He answered at random, was less self-possessed than usual, and retired early to rest.

Gertrude was not more than commonly inquisitive, but she could not refrain that evening from casting her eyes over the second column of the *Times*. The first advertisement ran thus:—

"To R. C.—The information you are in quest of may or may not be forthcoming. Difficulties are in the way. There is much danger, and the expenses will be heavy. State in your next advertisement *about* the sum you are disposed to lay out in bringing the matter to a close. The parties concerned are difficult to satisfy.—W."

The other advertisements were principally frantic appeals on behalf of missing lap-dogs, and bank-notes "of no value to any body but the owner." The first advertisement must be the one. R. C., too, his own initials. There was no doubt about it. It was certainly mysterious.

Clinton the next morning started for London, with many apologies for the abruptness of his departure ; but pleading in justification the pressure of sudden and unexpected business.

END OF VOL. II.



